Sahajanand Charitra

SATSANG PARICHAY

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 9

Sahajanand Charitra

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Glossary

Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 ce)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

The early years of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life have been narrated in *Ghanshyam Charitra* and *Nilkanth Charitra*, which are part of the Satsang Prarambha and Pravesh Examinations, respectively.

This book, *Sahajanand Charitra,* provides a narration of important episodes and events from the time of his appointment as Head of the Sampraday by Ramanand Swami until his return to his divine abode, Akshardham. During this time Sahajanand Swami's true, divine personality became evident to all.

The incidents are arranged in chronological order and the dates are based on the 'Halari Panchang', that is, the Vikram Samvat year which begins on the first day of the bright half of Ashadh and ends on the new moon day of Jeth. The chapters from 1 to 29 narrate incidents from Samvat 1858 to 1886 (1801 to 1830 ce), with one chapter for each year in sequence.

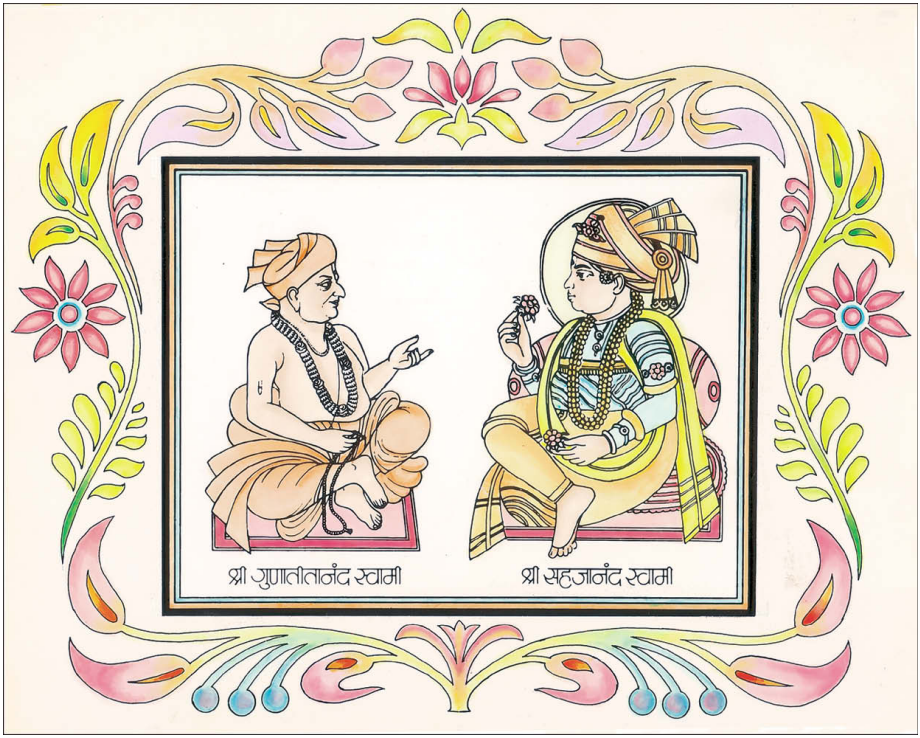
Reading and reflection on the incidents in this book will truly guide and inspire all spiritual aspirants on the spiritual path and provide all with an experience of genuine inner peace.

The English edition is a translation, with slight modifications, of the Gujarati original, *Sahajanand Charitra*.

This book is part of the curriculum for the third level, Satsang Parichay, of the Satsang Examinations.

It is our earnest prayer that all devotees study these books carefully, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefit and please our beloved guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

Translation

Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 ce)

CHAPTER 1

1. Swaminarayan – The Divine Mantra

On Magshar *sud* 13, Samvat 1858 (17 December 1801 CE) Ramanand Swami passed away at Faneni. All his disciples lamented the loss.

Sahajanand Swami and Muktanand Swami made arrangements for a *parayan* of the Bhagvad Gita, in which Maharaj gave his learned comments daily. The recitation concluded after eleven days. The after-death rites of the twelfth day and *Shravani Shraddh* were performed according to tradition. Everyone was fed and the Brahmins were given gifts.

On the thirteenth day, Sahajanand Swami explained the divine significance of the 'Swaminarayan' mantra and asked the devotees to chant the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. He revealed his divine form and the devotees sang bhajans in his praise. From then onwards, instead of singing the 'Ramkrishna Govind' *dhun*, devotees started singing 'Swaminarayan'.

Fourteen days after the passing away of Ramanand Swami, on Magshar *vad* 11, Samvat 1858 (31 December 1801 CE), the devotees requested Sahajanand Swami to sit on a separate *sinhasan*. Muktanand Swami and other sadhus sat by his side. All the devotees sat in front of the sadhus, and the women sat at a suitable distance.

On the basis of the shastras, Sahajanand Swami spoke about dharma, "Ramanand Swami appointed me as his spiritual heir. So now I am your guru. Therefore, listen very carefully to what I say for your benefit and practice in life what I preach for your betterment.

"The sadhus should cultivate the virtues of truth, compassion, austerities, purity, tolerance, non-violence, *brahmacharya*, regular study of scriptures, service, renunciation, and self-control and should behave as *atmarup*. Sadhus and householder devotees should worship God, abstain from drinking alcohol and should not eat meat. They should not harm any living being. They should not commit suicide, nor steal nor slander anyone. They should never criticize any *deva*, should not listen to the religious discourses by atheists and should never eat what is unsuitable.

"Householders should observe all the sixteen *samskars* prescribed by the scriptures. They should always respect the Vedas, Brahmins, sadhus, scholars and *pativrata* wives. They should never cause grief to cows, Brahmins and devotees of God. They should practice charity, morality and dharma, compassion and *ahimsa* in life. They should always keep their thoughts, actions and speech pure and pious."

Many such sermons were delivered by Sahajanand Swami to his devotees. All were drawn towards him. They soon overcame their grief. They performed his *pujan* and placed many gifts at his feet. From that day, people started calling Sahajanand Swami by the beloved name of Shriji Maharaj.

* * *

A Brahmin called Shitaldas was seated in the assembly. He was in search of God. Someone told him, "Go to Ramanand Swami. He is a great *sadguru*. He will help you to attain God."

He went to Faneni. But he was disappointed when he learnt that Ramanand Swami had returned to Dham. He started lamenting his fate. He decided to return home. But Maharaj said to him, "Stay here for today. I will arrange for the darshan of Ramanand Swami. If you wish you can leave tomorrow afternoon." Shitaldas agreed to stay.

That day Sahajanand Swami asked him to chant the Swaminarayan mantra. While

chanting the mantra, Shitaldas entered samadhi. He had a vision of Akshardham. He saw Maharaj seated on a throne in Akshardham. He also saw Ramanand Swami standing with folded hands before Maharaj. Ramanand Swami said, "All the avatars are present with this Sahajanand Swami. He is the *avatari* of all avatars and the cause of all." When he woke up from the samadhi, Shitaldas narrated his experience of the divine vision and talked about the discussions that he had during the samadhi. He fell at the feet of Maharaj and prayed to him to accept him as a sadhu. Maharaj initiated him and named him Vyapkanand Swami.

2. Maharaj's Routine

Maharaj himself led a very rigorous and disciplined life and encouraged others to do so as well.

After serving food to the sadhus and others, he would take his meals. Then he would clean the kitchen and discourse till two in the afternoon. In the evening, after ablutions, he would take a bath and then feed the people who had come to collect alms.

Then he would discourse till twelve midnight before going to bed. Often, he would awake at 2.00 a.m. and wake up others and sit in meditation. During these sessions he kept a stick in his hand and prodded those who were found dozing during the meditation. At 4.00 a.m. he would bathe and perform puja. Then he would go to collect alms. He would prepare *rotla* and feed the pilgrims. Then, as described before, he would make them all sit in worship. This was his daily routine. Those who sought his company knew neither sleep nor rest.

This speaks of the great divine force and personality of Maharaj. It was no mean achievement for a young man of twenty-one to make elderly sadhus carry out his commands. All of them felt the divine spell of his personality and willingly did whatever he asked them to do.

3. Raghunathdas, the Great Obstruction

Maharaj went on a tour of Sorath. At Dhoraji, he stayed at Mavji Bhakta's house and discoursed to people in the courtyard of the house. To people of different faiths Maharaj granted visions of their chosen deities and of their heavenly abodes. He convinced them of his divinity. He showed the agonies of hell to the evil-minded and atheists. Thus, they all became *satsangis*.

Maharaj arrived at Bhader from Dhoraji, via Chhatrasa. From here he went to Manavadar and stayed with Mayaram Bhatt. Here, Raghunathdas created many problems for Maharaj. He pretended to be a great sadhu, with a view to usurp the seat of Ramanand Swami. He started behaving as if he were the guru and imitated Ramanand Swami, thus deceiving the innocent devotees. He spoke derisively about Maharaj before the devotees. He opposed Maharaj. Raghunath started saying, "I am the true disciple of Ramanand Swami and heir to his seat. I am his greatest disciple. Ramanand Swami has bestowed upon me all his spiritual powers and wealth. Therefore, I have declared myself the guru."

From Manavadar, Maharaj along with his sadhus and followers went to Piplana and stayed with Narsinh Mehta. He used to feed the sadhus and the devotees often. One evening, Maharaj visited a haunted banyan tree on the outskirts of the town. This banyan tree was possessed by thousands of evil spirits and ghosts. Maharaj held a religious assembly under the tree and instructed the devotees to sing the Swaminarayan mantra. The evil spirits were liberated as soon as the Swaminarayan mantra fell on their ears. He freed all the ghosts from their evil existence, granted them divine bodies and sent them all to Badrikashram. The next day, the devotees of Piplana fixed a swing on the banyan tree and rocked Maharaj with devotion.

All the devotees missed Ramanand Swami greatly, so Maharaj called Muktanand Swami and said, "Muktanand Swami, you go to Bhuj. The devotees there loved Ramanand Swami immensely. Please do go and console them."

Muktanand Swami made all the preparations to go to Bhuj, but before he left he told Maharaj, "This Raghunathdas is very arrogant and vain. He will not last in the Satsang. He does not know how to talk politely. You should not take to mind his loose talk. If he creates any trouble, send him off to Ahmedabad."

After saying this, Muktanand Swami went to Kutch, accompanied by a large group of sadhus.

4. Emptying Hell

From Agatrai Maharaj went to Kalvani. Bhimbhai went to Kalvani for his darshan. He bowed to Maharaj and said, "Maharaj! Here on this earth there is a common practice that whenever a son is born to the king or a new king is crowned, all the prisoners are released from the jails. Very recently you too were coronated. So, why should the *jivas* in hell remain as prisoners? People are happy that you have occupied the seat of dharma. We pray that you send your sadhus to release those *jivas* from hell." Maharaj was very happy to hear Bhimbhai's prayer. Maharaj instructed Swarupanand Swami, "Go to the realm of Yama. Chant the Swaminarayan mantra, grant salvation to all the *jivas* languishing as ghosts and spirits, and direct them all to the realm of Bhumapurush.

On receiving Maharaj's command, Swarupanand Swami entered into samadhi. He attained a divine body while in samadhi and went to the abode of Yama. He was moved by the sight of the souls suffering in the various pits of hell. As soon as he chanted 'Swaminarayan' all the suffering spirits came out of their existence in hell and attained a divine body with four hands, climbed into the *viman* and went directly to the realm of Bhumapurush. Swarupanand Swami woke up from samadhi and narrated everything in detail. On hearing him Maharaj observed, "I want to grant salvation to all – the holy and the sinful. Whosoever comes in contact with me or with my sadhus or devotees will be granted salvation." Bhimbhai was amazed to see Maharaj's generosity and desire to grant salvation to all.

On the full moon day of Posh, Maharaj arrived at Mangrol. He celebrated the festival of Poshi Punam in Mangrol and spent the entire month there. The Nawab of Manavadar invited Maharaj to visit Manavadar. So, in the month of Maha, Maharaj left

Mangrol for Manavadar. Maharaj stayed at the house of Mayaram Bhatt and Govindram Bhatt. Here on the banks of the river Ksharavati, Maharaj celebrated the Vasant Panchmi festival by spraying colours. Then he held an assembly. Jadavji Sheth performed *pujan* and presented Maharaj with a beautiful a pair of dhotis with a silken border. Raghunath could not tolerate this. He grew jealous of Maharaj. He thought, "I should be given these dhotis. They should adorn my body."

But Maharaj gifted them to Mayaram and Govindram. This annoyed Raghunath all the more. He grew very jealous and started speaking ill of Maharaj.

Maharaj sent for Raghunath, thinking, "This Raghunath will not allow anyone to live in peace. Wherever we go, he will cause trouble. He should be sent away." Maharaj showed great respect towards him and sat him by his side. Then, tactfully, Maharaj said, "Raghunath, the devotees in Gujarat are still feeling the pangs of Ramanand Swami's death. An ordinary person will not be successful in Gujarat. So, please, go to Ahmedabad and console the devoteees by giving religious discourses."

This inflated Raghunath's ego. He became very proud and replied, "I shall certainly go to Gujarat and give such discourses that the whole of Gujarat will be drawn to me."

After seeing Raghunath off, Maharaj went to Piplana. He stayed there for some time with Narsinh Mehta and then returned to Mangrol. Here he graced the festivals of Holi, Ram Navmi and Bhim Ekadashi. There was a neglected step-well in this town. Maharaj undertook the great humanitarian task of cleaning the step-well and its water, making it useable by all.

On Ashadh *sud* 11, Samvat 1859 (11 July 1802 CE), Maharaj celebrated the Dev Shayani Ekadashi. This was followed by the festival of Janmashtmi in the month of Shravan. Devotees from throughout Gujarat and Kathiawad attended these festivals. The devotees from Ahmedabad complained about the problems created by Raghunathdas and submitted a written report to Maharaj. So, Maharaj sent Ramdas Swami to Ahmedabad to restore peace and order in the Satsang.

CHAPTER 2

1. Magniram Becomes Advaitanand

Magniram was a Dravidian Brahmin from South India. He was an austere aspirant in search of God and had studied all the shastras. In his quest for God, he reached Bengal. There, he heard that a king named Pipa had in the past pleased goddess Sharda (goddess of learning) and she had helped him to realize God. Inspired by this, Magniram searched for a guru who had appeased Sharda Devi. In one village he found such a Brahmin. He asked the guru about how to win the favour of goddess Sharda. The guru was also a Dravidian. He had a young daughter of sixteen. He saw in Magniram a good match for his daughter, so he taught him the ways of winning goddess Sharda's favour.

Magniram followed the instructions and won the favour of goddess Sharda-Saraswati. He attained certain divine powers and went to the guru to take his leave. The guru said to him, "You are my pupil, therefore, you must obey my commands. It is my command that you marry my beautiful 16-year-old daughter." Magniram replied, "I want to remain a *brahmachari* all my life. Besides, my guru's daughter is a sister to me. So, I will not marry her." After giving this reply, he left for Jagannathpuri.

At Jagannathpuri he thought that he should try out his powers. He thought, "Let me make use of my powers and bring kings, yogis and *mahants* under my control and live a carefree life." He donned the dress of a mysterious sadhu with thickly matted hair on the head, big bushy moustache, long beard, big red eyes, a *sindur tilak* on his forehead, golden earrings and bangles. He looked horrible. He carried a *chipiyo* in one hand and a *pavan-pavdi* under his arm. He wore a short dhoti, and travelled in a palanquin. He was always surrounded by a band of disciples. At the front of this procession was a camel on which sat a *bawa* carrying a saffron-coloured emblem. Magniram went from one place to another with his retinue and collected payments of two thousand to five thousand gold *mahors* from the kings, yogis and *mahants* by impressing them with his black magic.

Once he arrived in Porbandar. He beat the head priest, Gusaiji, with his large forceps. He showed his magic power of mantra and collected gold *mahors* from him. Gusaiji told him, "At present the *jivanmukta,* Swaminarayan, is here in Mangrol. Everyone worships him as God. He is powerful and has divine powers. Instead of terrorizing little frogs like us why don't you win over the mighty Swaminarayan? Then people will accept you as one who has great divine powers. If you have courage you should see him. He easily wins over persons like you and makes them his disciples." This enraged Magniram. It added fuel to the fire of his anger. He was boiling with anger when he camped on the outskirts of Mangrol.

He sent one of his followers to the King of Mangrol and conveyed, "Send me five

thousand rupees or I shall shower stones on your town and with one mantra burn the entire town to ashes."

King Gajefarkhan replied, "Bawaji, I am prepared to pay not five thousand rupees but ten thousand provided you win our Bhagwan Swaminarayan with your powers."

The disciple returned empty-handed and told Magniram the whole story. Blinded by rage and ego, he came to Maharaj accompanied by about twenty followers. He struck the ground with his forceps and yelled, "O Jivanmukta! You are a hoax. If you are a true one, let me see your divine powers."

Maharaj replied, "I do not exhibit divine powers. I educate the people and lead them onto the path of dharma. I impart *jnan* to help the *jivas* attain *moksha* and teach them to offer devotion to God."

When Magniram heard Maharaj, he thought, "He is an ordinary sadhu." Threatening Maharaj, he asked him, "Have you heard my name? I am that Magniram who commands goddesses. Great emperors and men of prowess bow down before me. I have mastered the great wisdom of killing, hypnotism and paralysis. I have won the favour of Sharda Devi. With one puff of my breath, I can split a mountain into two, make heavy rain fall and set water ablaze. So, give me ten thousand rupees or I shall have the entire town drowned in the sea." Maharaj nonchalantly replied, "We have no money. If you want food, we are prepared to serve you with food. If you want to send your goddess you can do so. You can try your occult powers and black magic. We do not fear anything."

"I'll show you," said Magniram, striking the ground with his forceps, and returned to his lodgings. After taking a bath he performed puja. He tried many mantras but none were effective. At last he invoked goddess Sharda, who spoke to him, "With what aim had you left home? Didn't you want to attain God? Also, you were offered a bride, yet why did you remain a celibate? Because you wanted to realize God." Thus the goddess gave a lot of advice and said in conclusion, "Swaminarayan is superior to Indra, Chandra, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh and he is the master of all the gods. He is the object of my worship too. None can defeat him. So many goddesses like me long to serve at his feet. Therefore, be humble and seek his patronage. Become a sadhu and please him by *jnan*, service and bhakti."

This advice opened the inner eye of Magniram. He repented for all his misdeeds. An intense desire to seek refuge in Maharaj arose. He could not sleep the whole night.

At daybreak, after taking a bath, Magniram arrived at Maharaj's lodgings. He started cleaning the utensils which were lying in the kitchen from the previous night. After some time, some sadhus passed by. He very politely offered his respects to them. Then he went to Maharaj. He prostrated at Maharaj's feet and begged his pardon. He narrated what goddess Sharda had told him the previous night. He said, "Maharaj! You are supreme among all the avatars. You are the master of all. Please forgive all my crimes. Please be merciful and accept me. Make me your sadhu."

"Our sadhus are humble. You are egoistic as you are a leader. These two things cannot go together."

"Maharaj! I am at your command now. From today, I have shed my ego."

"Are you sure?" asked Maharaj. "Then remove your long beard, moustache and thick matted hair, because just as kings love their moustaches, *bawas* love their matted hair. Shave them. Then our sadhus shall trample on your moustache and matted hair. Do you agree to this?"

"Maharaj! It will be my great fortune," said Magniram, and had his hair, moustache and beard shaved off. Magniram scattered the hair on the path of the sadhus and then went to Maharaj to become a sadhu.

One of the devotees remarked, "Maharaj this man is a *bawa.* It is very difficult for a *bawa to* overcome his ego. He must be pretending to deceive others."

Therefore, Maharaj decided to test him one last time. He said to him, "Magniram! Everyone will be convinced that you have overcome your ego only when you carry a bundle of the sadhus' slippers on your head and circumambulate the assembly five times. Only then will you be absolved of all the sins you have committed upto now." Magniram was delighted to hear this proposal. He carried the bundle of shoes on his head and performed five *pradakshinas* of the sadhus.

When some of his disciples saw this, they remarked, "What are you doing Magniram? Have you lost your mind?" Magniram replied, "I am doing this for my salvation." Thus he calmed down his followers and once again requested Maharaj, "Make me a sadhu."

Then Maharaj talked to him about giving up worldly pleasures. Finally, Maharaj made him a sadhu and named him 'Advaitanand'. Nevertheless, the sadhus as well as the devotees always knew him as '*Devi-vala* Magniram' (Magniram who had the *devi* at his command).

2. Nishchay to Ramchandra Sheth

Ramanand Swami used to run an almshouse to feed the needy at Mangrol. Maharaj thought of restarting it so that the pilgrims going to and from Dwarika could be served. With this thought, Maharaj started giving alms at a place which belonged to a *vairagi* named Atmaram, with his permission. But after some time, he started creating trouble, so the almshouse was discontinued.

Maharaj once went to Dudh Talavdi in Mangrol for a bath. He was accompanied by many devotees, including Ramchandra Sheth. All of them were bathing and chanting the Narayan mantra. Surveying the pond, Ramchandra Sheth thought that the water was very clean but there was no stone slab for washing clothes. He looked around and spotted a smooth stone weighing about 1,000 *maunds* some fifty to sixty steps away. He said to Maharaj, "You are God. Had you not lifted Mount Govardhan in your avatar as Krishna? If you lift that stone with one finger, and put it here on the bank of this pond, people will be convinced that you are God."

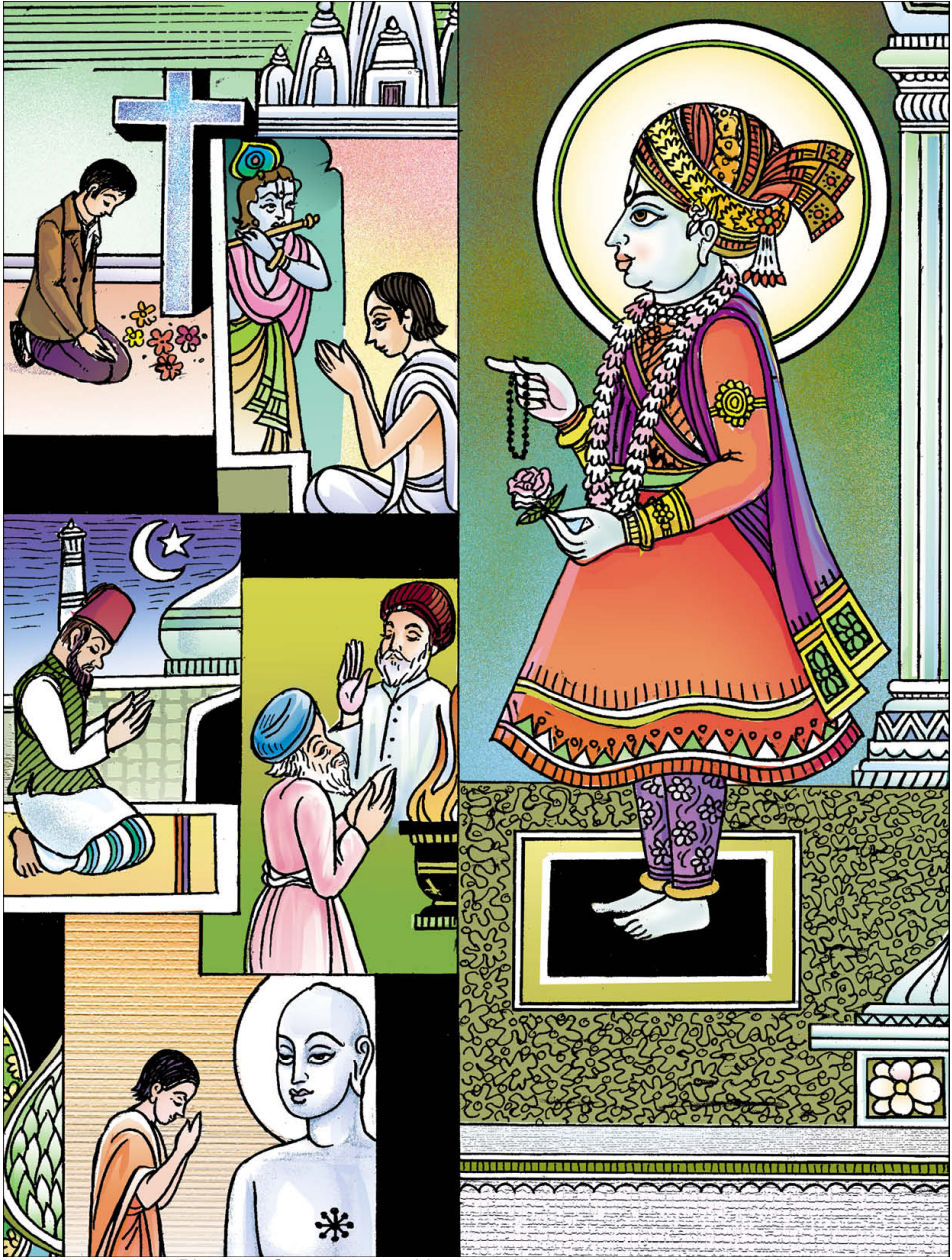
Maharaj said, "You go and touch the stone. Devotees like you, who are associated with me, shall make the stone fly to this spot."

Ramchandra Sheth went there and touched the stone. Instantly, the stone flew and fell into the water near the bank of the lake. Everyone was wonderstruck at this rare sight. They all washed their clothes on the slab, took their bath, changed their clothes

and returned to the town with Maharaj.

Maharaj then said to Ramchandra Sheth, “If by lifting stones one can be called God, then Hanumanji had lifted Gandhmadan mountain, which was bigger than even Mount Govardhan. To grant others samadhi, to show the divine abode of God, to grant salvation to any *jiva* by transforming his *antahkaran*, to transform even an evil person into a God-worshiping devotee by freeing him of his flaws – these are the functions of God. Therefore, you should not believe that one who performs miracles or shows powers is God.”

3. Experiences of Samadhi



Bhagwan Swaminarayan blesses spiritual aspirants with samadhi

Maharaj granted samadhi to many people at Mangrol and Kalvani. Some attained samadhi by his mere look or touch. By Maharaj's grace, some people attained samadhi by merely touching his walking stick or a flower, garland or garment worn by him. Not only humans, but at times, even monkeys, sparrows, pigeons, peacocks, fish and other animals also attained samadhi. At times, by merely hearing a word from Maharaj or by getting a glimpse of his divine *murti* or by hearing the sound of his wooden slippers or by merely entertaining a thought about him, people attained samadhi. Sometimes even

his disciple-sadhus and devotees, both male and female, by his divine grace, helped people to attain samadhi.

During samadhi, some performed *yogic* exercises and some practised the eighty-four *yogic* postures. Some had a vision of the *jivas* suffering in hell while some received flogging from Yama himself. Seekers belonging to different faiths had darshan of their chosen deities and their divine dwelling places. In the state of samadhi, followers of Rama saw Rama, Vaishnavs saw Radha-Krishna, Muslims saw Pegamber, Jains saw Tirthankars, Shaivites had the darshan of Lord Shiv, Devi devotees had a vision of Devi, and some people had a rare glimpse of Maharaj himself in Akshardham. Certain *mumukshus* saw all the twenty-four avatars emerging from and merging into the divine form of Maharaj. Some people remained in samadhi for an hour and some had samadhi for two hours. Some people remained in that state for one day and some remained in samadhi for many days together. There were instances of people remaining in the state of samadhi for one, two or even six months. Such people in samadhi were placed in a pile. Whenever some came to call a person in samadhi, Maharaj revived them by calling out their personal names.

4. Annakut in Loj

The devotees from the village of Loj requested Maharaj, "Maharaj! You have not visited Loj since your accession as the head of the Sampraday. Therefore, this time, please come to celebrate Annakut in Loj." Maharaj honoured their feelings and accepted their invitation. Accordingly, Maharaj arrived in Loj from Kalvani and celebrated Diwali and Annakut with great fanfare. At that time a Bania devotee came to Loj from the port of Diu. He was a disciple of Ramanand Swami. He thought, "How great and divine is Maharaj?" At that time, Maharaj asked a five-year-old boy in the assembly to get up. He said to him, "Please narrate the thought in the mind of this Sheth."

Soon the boy started revealing the thoughts in the mind of the Sheth. The Sheth was completely spellbound. He was convinced about the divine form of Maharaj. He stayed there for several days and then returned to his town. But now he had become disinterested in his home and family. So after a few years he renounced the world and came to Maharaj. Maharaj initiated him into the *paramhansa*-fold and named him Prabhanand Swami.

After bestowing divine happiness on the devotees of Loj, Maharaj went to Kalvani to celebrate the festival of Prabodhini Ekadashi.

5. Realization to Muktanand Swami

In Kutch, Muktanand Swami learnt that Maharaj was granting samadhi to all. He had heard how by the mere darshan of Maharaj, the heart of devotees ceased to beat. He could not readily accept these stories about such easily attained samadhi. He was greatly puzzled about it because he had great affection for Satsang. The stories about samadhi appeared impossible to him. He thought that perhaps those who talked about samadhi had not understood the facts properly. He thought, "During my long

association with the Satsang I have never heard such stories before." Therefore, when Maharaj came to Meghpur, out of his attachment for Satsang, Muktanand Swami took Maharaj to a private room and started scolding him:

"Mahārāj diyo ā pākhand meli, Satsangmā na thavu feli;
Samādhi kai nathi soyali, Mota yogi ne pan doyali.
Te to jene tene kem thay, Bijā mane ame na manāy."

"Maharaj, give up this pretence. Do not allow it to spread in the Satsang. Samadhi is not easy to attain. It is rarely attained even by great yogis. So how can anyone and everyone attain it? Let others believe this, but I cannot so easily believe it."

Maharaj then explained to him, "All the devotees get together and sing bhajans of Ramanand Swami. Doing that, some of devotees attain samadhi."

Then Maharaj asked Santdas, a disciple of Muktanand Swami, to meditate. Instantly, his heart stopped and he attained samadhi. Maharaj then spoke to Muktanand Swami, "Muktanand Swami, you know how to check the pulse. Why don't you examine the pulses in Santdas's arms and legs? If you can, try to wake him up." Muktanand Swami thoroughly examined Santdas, who lay there like a corpse.

After some time, Santdas woke up from the samadhi. Maharaj said to Santdas, "Describe the darshan that you had during samadhi."

Santdas spoke, "I had been to Akshardham while in samadhi. There, I saw Maharaj seated on a divine throne. I saw guru Ramanand Swami serving and praying to Maharaj. I also saw innumerable deities, such as, Shiv, Brahma and other avatars standing on one leg worshiping Maharaj. Then Ramanand Swami asked me, "Why does Muktanand Swami not believe? A fact will remain a fact. It will not turn false. All will be convinced in the end." Muktanand Swami listened to all this, but was not satisfied. He did not feel peace of mind.

Then Maharaj and the sadhus went to Kalvani. There Maharaj, the sadhus and devotees went to bathe at a place away from the town. Muktanand Swami, accompanied by Parvatbhai, went to answer the call of nature in a nearby forest of *khakhra* trees (*butea frondosa*). On their way back from the jungle, Ramanand Swami appeared to Muktanand Swami. He left his gourd and prostrated at the feet of Ramanand Swami. Tears began to roll down his cheeks. With tearful eyes he narrated everything to Ramanand Swami. Ramanand Swami consoled him and reminded him, "Hadn't I told you that I was just a drum-beater. The real actor was yet to come. He is this Varni. I have spun just a sliver from the huge piles of cotton. The whole lot is yet to be spun. It will be spun by this Maharaj. He is our God." On hearing this, all doubts disappeared from the mind of Muktanand Swami. A fountain of divine joy spontaneously sprouted in his heart. He could not restrain his joy and instantly composed the following kirtan and joyfully sang it: *"Bhramanā bhāngi re ho haiyāni, Vāt kene nathi re kahyāni, Viti hoy te re ho jāne."* – "All doubts have been resolved. It cannot be explained to anybody. Only the sufferer can know what he feels and how he feels about it."

When Parvatbhai saw the joy on Swami's face, he asked, "Swami, have you won something? Why are you in such cheerful mood?"

Muktanand Swami talked to him about the darshan of Ramanand Swami. Then he bathed and collected some flowers from the forest. He made a garland and returned to their lodgings. He asked for the seat and pillow used by Ramanand Swami, and the wooden slippers worn by Ramanand Swami. When Maharaj arrived there after his bath, Muktanand Swami urged Maharaj to wear the wooden slippers and despite Maharaj's reluctance sat him on Ramanand Swami's seat. Then he applied sandalwood paste on Maharaj's forehead and lovingly garlanded him. He instantly composed the *arti*, *"Jai Sadguru Swami…"* and while singing it performed the *arti*.

Then he described to the assembly the darshan given to him by Ramanand Swami and respectfully offered prostrations to Maharaj. Maharaj also bestowed great pleasure upon Muktanand Swami. That day was Kartik *sud* 10, Samvat 1859 (5 November 1802 CE). Thereafter, many people attained samadhi at the mere word or touch of Muktanand Swami. All his doubts dissolved and Muktanand Swami came to know the divine form of Maharaj.

6. Excommunication of Harbai and Valbai

While in Loj, Maharaj had sent letters to every town and village, inviting the devotees to participate in the festival of Prabodhini Ekadashi in Kalvani. So, many devotees from Gujarat, Kutch and Kathiawad arrived there.

On the auspicious day of Ekadashi, after finishing his morning bath and puja, Maharaj held an assembly. Cushioned seats were arrangement for the senior sadhus. Just then Valbai and Harbai arrived and went directly to the reserved seats. Their male and female followers came with them and also occupied those seats.

Valbai was of the Kanbi community and Harbai was of the Kumbhar. Both of them were disciples of Atmanand Swami. They were scholarly, but vain. But somehow, Ramanand Swami had tolerated them.

As these two arrogant women had occupied the special seats meant for the sadhus, which were placed near the seats for the male devotees, the sadhus left the assembly. Maharaj very politely said to these women, "Why are you behaving like this? Why do you wear the dress of female renunciants and yet keep male company? Why do you come to where the sadhus are such that they have to observe a fast? Therefore, if you sincerely wish to remain in the Satsang you should strictly adhere to the rules of Satsang. You should not preach to males."

The two women could not stand this. They told Maharaj, "We are *jivanmuktas*. Our association with men is not going to affect us. For us, there is no difference between men and women. They are all creatures made of flesh and blood. From childhood we have been celibates. If lust could not touch us in our youth, how is it going to lure us when we are old? Again, neither Atmanand Swami nor Ramanand Swami had ever rejected us like this. Who are you, a newcomer, to advise us so? So, we are not going to pay any heed to your advice. And if you still insist, then we will leave along with our disciples, and shall found a separate sect."

Thereupon, describing the dharma of renunciant sadhus and women, Maharaj said:

"Jevo purushne nārino sang, Tevo pramādne purush prasang,

Eto chhe ghrut agni samān, Emā karvu nahi abhimān;
Lidhi hoy jo indriyo jiti, Toye saune shikhavvā suriti,
Motā mukta rahe tethi dur, Evi rit chalāvvā jarur."

"The way men are tempted in the company of women; women too are lured by men.

It is like the coming together of ghee and fire.

None should be proud of their self-control.

Even the great *muktas*, who have attained complete control on their *indriyas*, remain away from women to set an example for others. It is very essential to continue this practice."

Maharaj cited many examples from the shastras of how the free mixing of men and women leads to moral lapses. But the two women would not accept.

Therefore, Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj! Harbai, Valbai and Raghunathdas – these three are very vain. These two women behaved in an equally bad manner even before Ramanand Swami. He endured them against his own will. Now if they are tolerated any more, then they will misguide many innocent devotees. They will lead them astray from the path of *moksha*. Therefore, let us once again try to make them understand. If they still remain adamant then we should excommunicate them."

Maharaj returned to the congregation and once again calmly tried to convince them, but they stubbornly refused to accept. They refused to leave their seats. Maharaj declared to the assembly that Harbai and Valbai were excommunicated. On hearing Maharaj's pronouncement, the two women, followed by their male and female disciples, left the assembly. They founded a new sect at village Tramba, but it did not last for long. Thus the lapse in dharma was completely uprooted and the Satsang earned great prestige as a pious Sampraday.

7. Darshan in Two Forms

Maharaj celebrated Ekadashi and Kartik Punam at Kalvani. There, Narayan Dave and his son, Narsinh, from the village Akha prayed to Maharaj, "Maharaj, please do visit our village." Narsinh Mehta from Piplana also requested Maharaj to visit his town. Maharaj promised both of them. "OK, we shall come." They bowed to Maharaj and went to their respective villages to tell everyone.

Maharaj went to Agatrai. He stayed there for a day and left. He then arrived at the spot where the roads to Akha and Piplana diverged. Devotees from both villages had arrived there to receive Maharaj. Both groups received him with great fanfare. They played the drums, cymbals, etc., and joyfully sprayed lots of *gulal*. Both groups garlanded Maharaj and stood on either side of him. The devotees from Akha said, "Maharaj, we have made all the preparations, including food. Please grace our village by paying a visit." The Piplana group also urged, "No Maharaj, please come to our village. We, too, have prepared food for all."

Both the groups were very sincere in their affection towards Maharaj. Their hearts were overflowing with joy. So, to decide what to do, Maharaj conferred with Muktanand Swami and Mayaram Bhatt in private. Both Muktanand Swami and

Mayaram Bhatt said to Maharaj, “Maharaj! You are capable of taking infinite forms. When Brahma had taken away the calves and children Lord Krishna had assumed the forms of those calves and children for six months. You possess even greater powers. Therefore, do not displease anybody. Please satisfy both the groups.” Maharaj replied, “OK.”

Then Maharaj approached the devotees of Piplana and said, “You go back to your village. We will come there soon.” The devotees were very happy to hear this and started towards their village with great joy. Then, Maharaj along with three hundred sadhus and devotees accompanied the devotees of Akha.

Maharaj, with his great *yogic* powers, created a second form of himself and the three hundred sadhus and devotees with him and after a while reached Piplana. Thus, he visited Akha and Piplana at the same time and dined there and accepted the service of the devotees from both places. In the evening when some devotees from village Piplana arrived at Akha for some work, they were amazed to find Maharaj there. They told the people, “Maharaj, and the sadhus and devotees are also camping at our place.”

Thereupon, the devotees from Akha went across the river Ozat for the darshan of Maharaj. Thus, from morning to evening, out of sheer curiosity, the devotees went between Akha and Piplana for the darshan of Maharaj, and the sadhus and devotees. Everyone was amazed. Thus, Maharaj gave darshan in two forms for a few days. Then Maharaj said, “We want to perform a Vishnu Yagna on the banks of the river Ozat. So we will now stay there.” So saying, he left both the villages and both his different forms merged into each other on the banks of the river Ozat and became one.

Maharaj stayed there for nearly six months and fed the Brahmins daily with rich food. He performed a great Vishnu Yagna and many people became *satsangis*. He concluded the *yagna* on Jeth *sud* 10 and left the banks of the river Ozat for Meghpur.

CHAPTER 3

1. A Fakir is Shown a Miracle

When Maharaj was in Meghpur a fakir came. He had heard about Maharaj's spiritual powers, influence and samadhis. He thought, "People know Swaminarayan as God. Only if he shows a miracle will I believe him as Allah and sing his praise." With this wish he went for the darshan of Maharaj. The omniscient Maharaj called Karsanji Bhaat to him and stood him by his side. He said to him, "You recite the Koran." Bhaat replied, "Maharaj, I don't know what the Koran is."

Maharaj said, "You concentrate on my *murti* and start reciting whatever comes to your mind. And *fakir baba*, you take out the Koran from your bag and start comparing. If this Bhaat goes wrong, do correct him. Do not hesitate to do so." Then Maharaj cast a divine glance at Bhaat. With his eyes shut, Karsanji Bhaat started reciting the verses of the Koran. He recited each and every verse exactly as written in the Koran. The fakir was greatly amazed. He said, "Maharaj, this Karsanji is not reciting the Koran, but it is you who is reciting it." So saying he started offering his *namaz* at Maharaj's feet. He was convinced that Maharaj was Allah-Khudatala himself. He took a vow before Maharaj not to indulge in alcohol, meat-eating, theft or adultery.

2. Alms Distribution Activities

Maharaj stayed in Meghpur for two months, where he celebrated Devpodhi Ekadashi. Maharaj started an almshouse here as many pilgrims, sadhus, *sannyasis*, *bawas*, and householder devotees, on their way to Dwarka, passed by this town. Maharaj also began alms distribution centres at Manavadar, Sardhar, Faneni, Agatrai and Loj. Daily, many people collected alms from these centres and were filled with a sense of gratitude. The recipients used to inquire, "Who runs this almshouse?" When they learnt that these centres were being run by Bhagwan Swaminarayan many would go for his darshan out of curiosity and would become *satsangis* due to the divine attraction of Maharaj. Thus, many sadhus, *bawas*, *vairagis* and their devotees were attracted towards the magnetic personality of Maharaj. Some of them entered into samadhi as soon as they heard his name. They would leave their own sects, renounce and to stay with him.

This infuriated some of the *bawas, vairagis* and mahants. They alleged, "This Jivanmukta possesses some black magic. He hypnotizes people, lures our disciples and converts them into his devotees. Therefore, we must destroy all his almshouses wherever we find them. We must plunder his grain stocks, break the *janoi* and *kanthi* of the sadhus and throw their pujas away."

Soon they translated their ideas into action and started beating the sadhus serving in the almshouses. When Maharaj learnt of this harassment of the sadhus, he wrote

letters to the sadhus asking them to bravely and patiently continue giving alms. He wrote:

"Even if they beat, abuse, insult, plunder or make you fast, continue the almshouses. A true sadhu must learn to tolerate all this. We want to liberate infinite *mumukshus*. So, you should pardon them. You should not lose heart. Have patience. Run the almshouses while remembering God." Thus he encouraged the sadhus and injected great vigour through such letters.

Then, after celebrating Janmashtmi at Manavadar, Maharaj came to Bhader. He stayed here with Rajkumar Vaghjibhai and Patalbhai, and celebrated the festivals of Kapila Chhoth, Dasera and Annakut.

3. The Sweeter Buttermilk

Bhader is a small village. Maharaj came to this village. A very affectionate devotee named Patalbhai lived there. He and his wife had great affection towards Maharaj. They thought, "Maharaj has come to our village. He is staying with respected Kathis and Garasias. Is it in our fortune that he visits our house?"

On the very next day Maharaj went to Patalbhai's house. The house was dark and there was only a dim light in the verandah. On seeing Maharaj, Patalbhai was overjoyed. He layed out a cot, placed a cushion on it and sat Maharaj on it. Patalbhai's wife came to Maharaj with a container of milk. She poured it into a cup and offered it to Maharaj. Sipping the milk, Maharaj observed, "This milk is very sweet. Have you put sugar into it? Or is it the milk of a *parath* buffalo? Fill my cup again." Patalbhai's wife refilled the cup and said, "No Maharaj, it is the milk of our domestic buffalo." Maharaj asked for and drank three cupfuls of milk. The container became empty.

Then Patalbhai's wife went inside to bring some buttermilk for the other devotees. When she opened the buttermilk container, she saw that it actualy contained milk. She realized that she had served Maharaj buttermilk instead of milk and that the milk remained untouched. She felt very sorry and started repenting. Tearfully she requested Maharaj to forgive her, "O Maharaj! Please forgive me. I have by mistake served you buttermilk. The milk is lying unused inside. Maharaj, please forgive my mistake."

Maharaj smiled and replied, "Don't worry. You served me buttermilk with such great affection that I found it sweeter than milk." Thus he consoled and made her happy. Then he went to the village Mod, where he celebrated the Prabodhini Ekadashi and then left for Alaiya.

4. Test of Sundarji Suthar

The prince was getting married and Sunderji Suthar was leading the marriage party from Bhuj. When he arrived in Gondal, he learned that Maharaj was at Bandhia at Mulubhai's house. He asked the marriage party to stay at Gondal saying, "I have some important work at Bandhia. I'll go and return soon." Sunderji Suthar galloped fast to Bandhia and arrived at Mulubhai's house. He took off his turban and fell at the feet of Maharaj. Maharaj inquired, "Who has come?" Sunderjibhai replied, "Maharaj, your humble servant."

Maharaj wanted to test him and so he asked, “What are the qualities of a humble servant?” Sunderjibhai replied, “One who does as told is a humble servant.” Maharaj said, “Really? Then get your moustache and head clean-shaved right now, and become a sadhu and go to Kashi.”

Sunderjibhai was a very bold devotee. He immediately sent for a barber and had his head and moustache shaved. He donned the robes of a sadhu and fell at the feet of Maharaj.

Maharaj said to Dosabhai who was seated next to him, “Do you recall that Ramanand Swami had once asked you to go on a pilgrimage to Kashi? Now, at this very moment, walking barefoot, without taking anything with you and with only the clothes you are wearing, go on a pilgrimage to Kashi with Sunderjibhai.”

Dosabhai immediately bowed at the feet of Maharaj and happily left for Kashi in the company of Sunderjibhai. They must have covered about three miles when Maharaj turned to Muktanand Swami and said, “What have you to say about my actions. I made a minister into a sadhu.”

Muktanand Swami said, “Maharaj, there will be trouble in the entire Kutch region. His was the only place where we could stay and carry out *satsang* activities without hindrance. That branch has now been cut.”

Maharaj said, “Is that really so? Then call them back. Send a man on horseback to give our message and call them back.”

The messenger rode fast on the road to Kashi. He met the two pilgrims at a distance of about three miles. He stopped them and said, “Maharaj has ordered you to return immediately.”

Sunderjibhai and Dosabhai came back. Sunderjibhai bowed at the feet of Maharaj. Maharaj asked, “Who has come?”

Sunderjibhai replied, “Your humble servant.”

Maharaj once again asked, “What are the qualities of a humble servant?”

Sunderjibhai once again gave the same reply, “One who does as told is a humble servant.” Maharaj said, “Really? Then remove these robes of a sadhu and again put on the clothes of a householder.”

Sunderjibhai once again put on the clothes of a householder. Maharaj became very happy and gave prints of his divine feet on his chest. Then he sought Maharaj’s permission to leave. While taking his leave he remarked, “Maharaj, there is no harm in testing a man like me, but do not put others to such tests.” Thus he exhibited a little pride, but Maharaj remained quiet. He just smiled at him and saw him off.

In the evening Sunderbhai returned to Gondal. When the members of the wedding party saw the clean-shaven Sunderjibhai, they asked, “You are leading a marriage party. Why did you remove your moustache and hair? Won’t this be a bad omen?” He replied, “My family deity is in Bandhia. I had taken a vow to do this so that the Prince’s marriage is completed without any obstruction and also as an to my departed ancestors. Hence this shaving.”

Everyone said, “Then that is very good.” Thus, Sunderjibhai tactfully explained to everyone.

5. Protection of Mulji Sheth

During the course of his travels, Maharaj arrived in Kariyani. Mulji Sheth of Memka came there.

"Maharaj, please grace my village Memka," prayed Mulji Sheth. All the devotees spoke in one voice, "Maharaj do not go to Memka. Barring Mulji Sheth, Hansraj Suthar, Shamo Agolo and Shamo Kansagaro, the entire village is against you. They will cause trouble."

But Maharaj honoured the feelings of Mulji Sheth. He had to submit to his love and devotion. He said, "You go and make preparations. We shall certainly come to Memka." Maharaj prepared everyone and went to Memka.

Mulji Sheth spent everything he had and arranged a grand reception for Maharaj. He made all the arrangements to ensure maximum comfort for Maharaj. Maharaj stayed for three days at Memka and before leaving Maharaj said, "Sheth, all four of you should leave this place. Within twenty days you should collect all your belongings, sell off your house and leave. Hold my feet and take a vow that you will leave this village." All four devotees touched Maharaj's feet and vowed to do so.

Hansraj migrated to Kholadiyad, and Agolo and Kansagaro went to Chanpar. Within fifteen days Mulji Sheth also collected his belongings, vacated his house and reached Limbdi. On the twenty-first day, Babaji led the Gaekwad army to Memka and plundered it. They burnt many houses and looted the people. The omniscient Maharaj thus saved all the four devotees.

6. Excommunication of Raghunathdas

Maharaj arrived in Vartal via Bochasan. He talked about the glory of Vartal, blessed the devotees and then reached Ahmedabad via Jetalpur. In Ahmedabad, he stayed in a place near the five wells. It was a secluded place, so Ramdas Swami and devotees from Ahmedabad gave a detailed report on the mischiefs played by Raghunathdas. They complained, "This Raghunathdas has caused many to fall from Satsang. He has changed their minds and converted them to his side."

But Maharaj thought, "Let me once again try to make him understand."

One day Raghunathdas came to Maharaj with several of his disciples. Maharaj received him in his room and honoured him by asking him to sit on a grand seat. Maharaj spoke to him very affectionately. He said, "You are a senior disciple of Ramanand Swami. You are scholarly and have good understanding. You should follow the commands of Ramanand Swami and must give up gossipping. You too should be a *sadguru* and like Muktanand Swami tour the villages with a group of sadhus. Spread the message of *satsang* to all. If you want to become a *mahant* we will make you *mahant* of Ahmedabad."

But Raghunathdas became difficult. He arrogantly shouted at Maharaj, "Who are you to advise me? You are just a novice. If you are interested in your welfare then you should obey me." He thus shouted indiscriminately.

While this drama was going on, a gang of *vairagis* equipped with staffs, forceps, spears, *trishuls* and other weapons, entered the ashram shouting, "Where is

Jivanmukta?" They rushed towards Maharaj. Within no time, Maharaj assessed the situation and indicated to Ramdasji. Tactfully Maharaj, Ramdasji and other sadhus got up and left the ashram through another gate.

Raghunathdas, who was greatly annoyed, remained seated. When the *vairagis* saw him on the seat, they thought, "This apears to be Jivanmukta." Their leader ordered, "Attack this *Jivanmukta*. He has mentally harassed many people." The *vairagis* started attacking Raghunathdas with their staffs and forceps. Raghunathdas and his disciples were mercilessly beaten by the gang of *vairagis*.

The next day, Maharaj convened an assembly. He honoured the wishes of the great sadhus and devotees and excommunicated Raghunathdas from the Satsang. Thus, Maharaj brought peace to the Satsang. He sent letters to all the regions annoucing the excommunication of Raghunathdas. He wrote, "From today Raghunathdas has been excommunicated from the Satsang. He is spreading *kusang*. No one should associate with him. Those who seek his company shall lose their place as a devotee. Therefore, all keep away from him." He sent a special messenger carrying this message to every town and village. After creating a congenial atmosphere for Satsang among the devotees of Ahmedabad, Maharaj set out for Bhuj.

7. Diksha to Lalji Suthar

After restoring peace in Ahmedabad, Maharaj went via Halvad to Bhadra, in the Halar region. One evening, Vashram Suthar went to his farm. While he was digging there, thousands of ants came out of the ground. Seeing them, he thought, "Oh! At this time Purushottam Narayan himself and his divine abode are here, so how can these *jivas* associate with them? How can they attain *kalyan?* If I had the power, I would send them all to Vaikunth right now." As this thought was going through his mind, thousands of divine chariots arrived. All the ants died, assumed divine bodies, sat in the chariots and went to Vaikunth.

Vashrambhai saw all this and was surprised. He went from his farm to Maharaj and told him everything. Then he asked Maharaj, "Maharaj, what great work had the ants done that they attained Vaikunth?" Maharaj said, "There is nothing new here. It is due to the presence of the manifest form of Akshar and Purushottam. Today, if you had wished, 'May the ants go to Akshardham,' then they would have gone to Akshardham. That is the strength of the *upasana* of the manifest forms of Akshar and Purushottam. In fact, if you had wished for the *kalyan* of all the *jivas* of the *brahmand*, that too would have happened."

After spending a few days in Bhadra and celebrating the Vasant Panchmi festival, Maharaj, went to Shekhpat where he stayed with Lalji Suthar. Then Maharaj asked, "I want to go to Kutch. Can I get a good person like you to guide me?" Lalji Suthar replied, "Maharaj, what if I come as a guide?" So saying, he took some food, a waterbag and some money and left with Maharaj towards Kutch. During their journey Maharaj made him give away the food to a beggar, money to thieves and water to a *mahapurush*. When Lalji became thirsty in the desert, Maharaj served him sweet drinking water from a creek containing salty-water. At last, in Adhoi, Maharaj asked

him to remove the clothes of a householder and don the attire of a sadhu and called him 'Nishkulanand'. Then Maharaj said to him, "Go and collect alms for us." Maharaj made him collect alms from his own in-laws and then took a meal of *rotla*.

After visiting Adhoi, Dhamadka, Kanthkot and Anjar, Maharaj arrived inh Bhuj.

CHAPTER 4

1. Visits to Kariyani and Gadhada

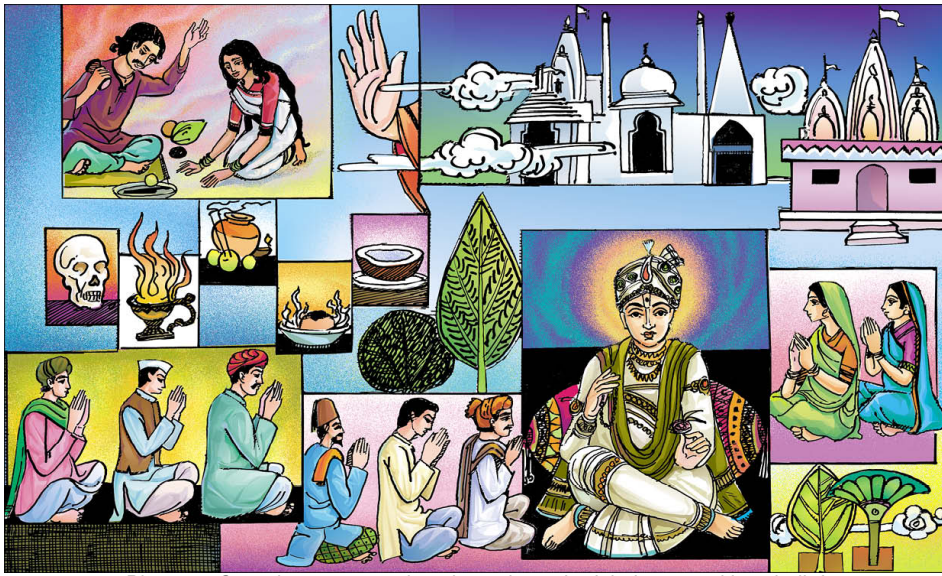
From Bandhia, Maharaj arrived at Sardhar, where he celebrated the Janmashtmi, Dashera and Annakut festivals.

On Kartik *sud* 15, Samvat 1861 (17 November 1804 ce), Maharaj left Sardhar and arrived in Kariyani. He stayed there at the house of Mancha Bhagat, who was a disciple of Ramanand Swami. Right from the beginning, he was a man of pure thoughts and actions. Maharaj stayed there and also in the *darbar* of Vasta Khachar. In Kariyani he started great humanitarian work by digging a lake on the outskirts of the town with the help of the sadhus and devotees. Maharaj also graced the marriage procession of Virdas Bhagat's son and graced each and every house in the town.

Abhel Khachar of Gadhada came to Kariyani and requested, "Maharaj, kindly visit Gadhpur and grace our *darbar*."

Abhel Khachar was accompanied by his whole family. All of them together prayed to Maharaj to visit Gadhada. Therefore, on Maha *sud* 11, Samvat 1861, (10 February 1805 ce), Shriji Maharaj arrived in Gadhada for the first time. Maharaj loved Gadhada as his own. He said, "This Gadhada is mine and I belong to Gadhada." At that time Abhel Khachar requested, "Maharaj, you are our life-force, therefore, do not leave us and Gadhada to go to some other place." Maharaj became very happy and gave a print of his feet on his chest. In the beginning Maharaj used to stay in the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar. There, he celebrated the Hutashani and Ramnavmi festivals.

CHAPTER 5



Bhagwan Swaminarayan convinced people to shed their superatitious beliefs

1. Removed Imaginary Fears and Superstitions

The worship of imaginary and evil gods and goddesses was prevalent. People were caught in the clutches of *bawas*, *vairagis*, cheats, exorcists, *jatis*, *fakirs* and Brahmins who gave talismans and magical threads. People lived constantly under the fear of superstitions, good and bad omens, and the wrath of gods and goddesses. When people fell ill, instead of seeking proper medical treatment, they tied talismans. *Bawas* and *bhuvas* deceived people in the name of *tantra* – black magic. People suffered from fear and superstition. Maharaj resolved to bring an end to this situation. First he inspired faith in God and moral living in his devotees. To free people free from the fear of imaginary gods and goddesses, black magic and talismans, he addressed a letter to all the *satsangis* in every town and village. He wrote:

"From *Anirdesh* I, Swami Shri Sahajanandji send 'Narayan' to all men and women devotees.

"The reason for writing this letter to you is to say that men are subject to happiness and misery, birth and death, according to his fate. Even Bhairav, Rudra, Bhavani, or other gods and the goddesses, cannot grant happiness or miseries, or life or death to man.

"Therefore, only *Parmeshwar Narayan* can change destiny and death and bring to life the dead and bring death to the living. No other god or goddess is capable of that. We are brave devotees of God. Therefore, devotees should never harbour any fear in

their mind.

"If black magic and medicines could revive people, we would have certainly come across someone immortal. But we have not seen anyone like that. Again, if much powerful black magic is directed by many enemies towards kings how can they still remain alive? If black magic can help them attain their desired fruits, why should they spend *lakhs* of rupees on arms and armies? They should appoint a powerful black magician and get all rivals killed with his help.

"But we don't find such things existing anywhere. Therefore, be fearless and sing in praise of Narayan while seeking the shelter of the almighty Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan. Ponder over the contents of this letter with utmost concentration of mind."

Thus he taught people to gain strength by refuge to God and by leading a pure religious life. He made his devotees fearless. Therefore, the devotees of Shriji Maharaj, even today, are not afraid of *kal,* karma, exorcists, *dakla*, *jogis, jatis, Bhairav, Bhavani,* talismans, good or bad omens, imaginary gods and goddesses, *virs* or *pirs*. They are proud of the supreme power that they possess in the form of Shriji Maharaj.

Maharaj departed from Gadhada and during his travels arrived at Dandhavya in North Gujarat. He bathed in the step well at Adalaj and stayed at Siddhpur for six days, where he celebrated a festival for three days. He called Brahmin cooks from different regions to prepare many sweet dishes and feed the Brahmins. At the end of his tour of the Dhandhavya region, he returned to Gadhada.

2. Murti-Pratishtha of Shri Vasudev-Narayan

Maharaj had told Jivuba and Laduba, "I will now stay at Gadhada with my sadhus." So, the two women had taken a vow that they would daily serve Maharaj first and then only they would take their meals.

One day, Maharaj asked them to allow him to go on a tour of the region. On hearing this, Panchuba, Jivuba and Laduba remarked, "You had promised to stay here. Therefore, you should not think of going elsewhere."

Maharaj replied, "I won't go away from you." He comforted them and resolved to keep his word.

In the early morning, as desired by Maharaj, two *muktas* from Akshardham came there to sell two black stone *murtis*. Maharaj said, "These *murtis* are my form. I will stay here and will be called by the name of Vasudev-Narayan." On Friday, Fagun *vad* 3, Samvat 1862 (7 March 1806 CE), a great festival was organized. Shivram Bhatt recited the Vedic mantras and Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* saying, "I shall forever dwell in this *murti* and shall accept all your offerings." Maharaj assigned the duty of offering of daily worship thal to Bechar Bhatt.

Now Jivuba and Laduba had no excuse to stop Maharaj from travelling. Maharaj was allowed to tour the regions.

3. Shunned Precious Things

The Kathis presented Shriji Maharaj with a sturdy horse. Maharaj used it for some days. One day, some Darbars said, "Maharaj, this is a *rozo* horse. No other horse in the

whole of Kathiawad can match it." "Is that so? Then this must be the finest horse," exclaimed Maharaj. Maharaj kept this in mind.

In the evening he went for a bath to the river on horseback. He played with the Kathis and made them very happy. There, a poor Brahmin was standing and watching them. He needed some money for some family occasion. The omniscient Maharaj knew his problem and approached the poor Brahmin holding the reins of the horse. He placed the reins in the hands of the Brahmin and said, "*Shri Krishnarpan* (It is all yours.)"

"No...no....no...," sighed the Kathis.

Maharaj replied, "An object which is very good causes attachment. I do not need the finest of objects."

The horse-loving Kathis became very unhappy. A good horse is as dear to them as a son. They mourned the loss for two days. But, gradually, they understood the words of Shriji Maharaj. This gave them a new awareness in life.

4. Method of De-Addiction

The Swaminarayan Sampraday had earned great name and fame in the society. The sadhus and the *satsangis* had impressed people by their pure actions and character. They helped people become free of various harmful habits, vices and addictions. They made the people addiction-free in a most friendly and casual way, without pressurizing them.

Mulu Khachar, a *garashiya* of Kambhala came for the darshan of Maharaj. He was attracted towards the luminous personality of Maharaj. When Maharaj asked him to become a *satsangi*, he said, "Maharaj! I am an opium and tobacco addict. I cannot give them up and therefore, I am unable to become a *satsangi*." Maharaj replied, "Don't worry. You just try to give them up. Even if you don't succeed you should accept *vartman* and be a *satsangi*. If you can't do anything, you can at least observe the five *vartmans*."

Mulu Khachar gained confidence and said, "OK, Maharaj! Make me a *satsangi*." So, Maharaj offered him *vartman* and made him a *satsangi*.

Mulu Khachar stayed with Maharaj at Gadhada. Whenever he found some free time from listening to the discourses he would retire to smoke his hookah.

After some days, Maharaj said to Mulu Khachar, "Mulu Khachar, join the devotees to celebrate the festival in Vartal. You must experience the hospitality of Gujarat." Mulu Khachar readily joined the group. T he devotees used to break their journey to take rest at certain towns and villages. There, Mulu Khachar would light his hookah and take a few puffs.

The locals who came to see the devotees criticized Mulu and would say, "All these people belong to the Swaminarayan Sampraday, but that man who smokes a pipe does not seem to be one of them!" These remarks irritated Mulu. He dashed his hookah on the ground and broke it into pieces. He shouted, "No more hookah from today!" Thus he gave up smoking.

Howwever, Mulu Khachar continued chewing tobacco and opium secretly. The

entire group reached Vartal. The devotees of Gujarat had arranged the lodgings of all the devotees from different places at one location. There, Mulu Khachar used to chew his tobacco and opium. All the *satsangis* had seen him doing so. Then Maharaj started introducing the *satsangis* from Kathiawad to those from Gujarat. All of them embraced each other. But they avoided Mulu Khachar, saying, "The one who chews tobacco and opium does not seem to be a *satsangi*!" Mulu Khachar decided then and there to give up tobacco and opium.

After three to four days when Maharaj learned that Mulu Khachar had given up the hookah, tobacco and opium, he called him and asked, "On whose advice did you give up your addictions?" Mulu Khachar replied, "Maharaj, at the insistance of non-*satsangis*, I gave up the hookah, and the made me give up tobacco and opium." He added, "Maharaj, you have showed great mercy on me by bringing me to this festival. You have changed my life by making me free from the slavery of addictions." So saying he fell at the feet of Maharaj.

Maharaj then left Vartal and went to Bhudej. There, he had a big lake dug for the benefit of the villagers. Then he returned to Gadhada via Kundal and Kariyani.

CHAPTER 6

1. Bhattji's Dilemma Solved

The Janmashtmi festival was approaching. Maharaj decided to celebrate it at Agatrai. Accordingly, Maharaj left Gadhada and arrived in Agatrai. He stayed there at the house of Parvatbhai. Parvatbhai threw his foodstore open to celebrate Maharaj's arrival at his house. Maharaj freely served ghee, jaggery and rice to the Kathis. Parvatbhai danced with joy. The Kathis realized the greatness of Parvatbhai. After celebrating the Janmashtmi festival, Maharaj stayed there for some time.

From Agatrai, Maharaj decided to return to Gadhada. Maharaj was resting after lunch, when Mayaram Bhatt came to pay his respects to Maharaj. Maharaj said, "Bhattji, come to Gadhada to celebrate the Annakut festival."

Bhattji was a bit hesitant, so Maharaj asked, "Why are you hesitant?" So Mayaram Bhatt said, "Maharaj, this year only the *bajro* crop is satisfactory and it is yet to be harvested. If I accompany you the crop will get spoilt or it will be looted by thieves."

Maharaj then observed, "Is that so? What if we help you to reap the harvest?"

"Then I will definitely come with you to Gadhada. I have long had a wish of celebrating the Annakut festival at Gadhada," said Bhattji.

Maharaj directed Parvatbhai to get some sickles from the devotees. At noon, accompanied by some fifty devotees, Maharaj went to the field of Bhattji at Manavadar. Maharaj also joined the sadhus and devotees and started cutting the *bajro* crop. Before sunset, the entire crop was harvested. Bales of grain were made, loaded onto a cart and then unloaded at Bhattji's house. The next day, Bhattji accompanied Maharaj to Gadhada.

2. Stopped Infanticide

In this time of economic hardship, ignorance and superstitions, many improper customs were prevalent. Maharaj fought against them. One such inhuman practice was that of killing the female baby soon after its birth – *dudh piti*. The Rajputs, Garashiyas and Kathis had to spend a lot of money on the marriage of their daughters. They had to give land and money in dowry. As a result, soon after the birth of a female baby, it was drowned in a milk pot. Maharaj commanded all his Kathi and Rajput devoteees to stop this inhumane killing of babies. This caused uproar in the Kathi and Rajput communities.

Maharaj was in Bandhiya. Some Kathis and Rajputs came there for darshan. Some questions were troubling their minds. They wanted to complain against the eradication of the old practice of *dudh piti*. Maharaj intuitively read their minds, knew what was troubling them and said, "By practising infanticide you are committing a three-fold sin. Firstly, it amounts to killing of an innocent member of the family; secondly, you are

committing the sin of infanticide and thirdly, you become guilty of murdering a helpless woman. Therefore you should not commit such a damnable sin."

The Kathis and Rajputs replied, "Maharaj, what can we do? We have to spend a lot on the marriage of our dauthters. We cannot afford this. Where are we to get so much money from? There is no way out except killing our daughters."

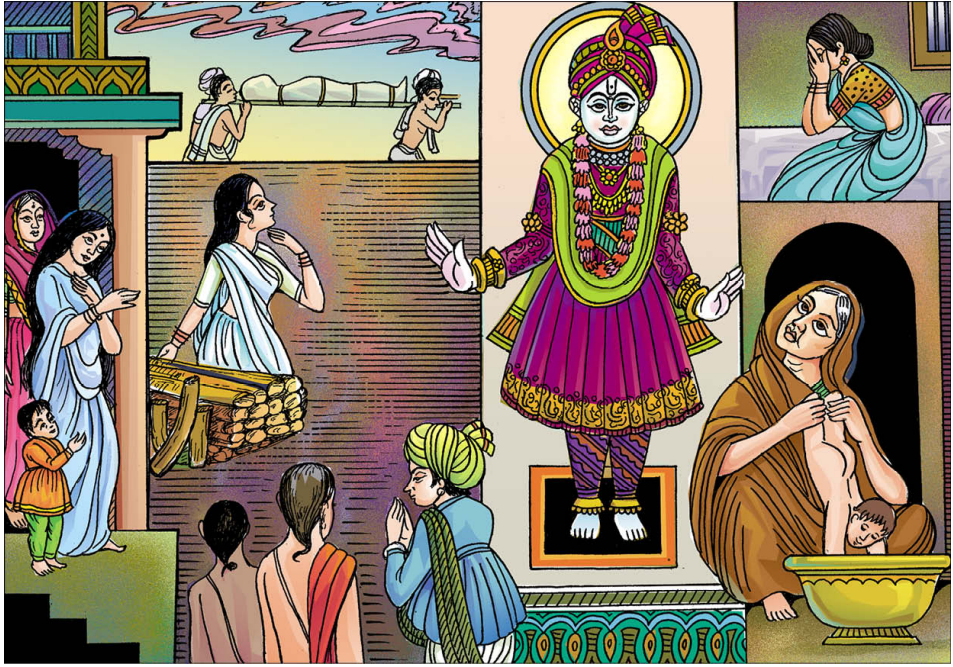
Maharaj replied, "Under no circumstances should you commit this sin. If you need money for the marriage of your daughters, we will collect money from the Satsang and shall help you. But you should not commit this sin of infanticide."

The Rajputs could not argue further when they heard these convincing and consoling words of Maharaj. One of them became bold and said, "Some of our young men are addicts and indulge in all types of vices. We don't want to marry our daughters to such people and lose our dignity even if we are financed by other people to arrange their marriages."

Maharaj thumped the cot and spoke in a voice of authority, prophesying, "When we undertake your responsibility, do you think we won't be able to get good bridegrooms for your daughters? Cast all your cares and worries on God then he will look after you. If you don't listen to our words, you will end up giving your daughters to savages in marriage. Now there will be such a rule (British rule) that the authority of law shall force you to give up your profession of plundering and looting. It will make you give up your improper customs. At that time you will be helpless and will have to stop all these evil customs. You will have to turn to God. But then nobody will help you. Therefore, follow our command and win our favour. Offer worship to God and he will come to your succour."

These words of wisdom opened the eyes of the Rajputs. They put faith in the words of Maharaj and promised to obey him. The prophecy of Maharaj came true. The British, in those days, were advancing from Surat towards the entire region of Gujarat and Kathiawad.

3. Eradication of Sati Custom



Bhagwan Swaminarayan introduced many reforms for the protection of women in society

In those days women used to climb the funeral pyre of their dead husbands and bring an end to their lives. This inhumane custom was practised in Bengal and Bihar. In Kathiawad also, this custom was being practised in certain Rajput communities. Maharaj won these people over by his love. He greatly influenced their society and heralded a great era of social reforms.

Maharaj fought against this inhumane custom, which was thrust upon the helpless and the illiterate women.

Maharaj not only preached against this evil custom of *sati,* but completely eradicated it from among the Kshatriya devotees also. As a result, this evil custom gradually disappeared from society. He brought about this social reform not by any coercion or threats, but by love, understanding and logical arguments. He built up public opinion against this evil custom by citing apt references from the scriptures. He made the people realize that this *sati* custom was unjust, cruel and inhumane.

Maharaj used to say in his discourses, "For a woman to become a *sati* is as grave a sin as that of committing suicide. We believe that no woman should ever commit suicide in the form of *sati*, however pious the place of pilgrimage may be, however great the husband may be, and however strong the public opinion may be. No man should ever encourage a woman to become a *sati*. To force a woman to become a *sati* is as grave a sin as that of murdering a woman. After the death of their husbands, women should not lose heart and should serve God as their husband. They should remain steadfast and true unto God and worship him while obeying their son, brother, father, or father-in-law. There is no *moksha* for those who become *sati*, because the soul stands condemned for having committed suicide. Therefore, when you have received this rare

human body, it should be fully used as a means for salvation."

Thus, Maharaj eradicated the *sati* custom from society and also curbed the insulting practice of addressing a widow as *rand*. Those widows who were leading spiritual lives were from now onwards, respectfully called *sankhya yogi* women.

4. Initiation of Paramhansas

At Lal Vad in Dhoraji, Maharaj celebrated the Fagan *sud* Punam festival.

After the passing away of Ramanand Swami to Akshardham, Maharaj always wore a white dhoti, saffron upper cloth and cap. When instated as the head, he had worn a *pagh*. After that, Maharaj had not worn any rich clothes. In Dhoraji, at the loving insistence of the devotees of Surat on the day of Punam, Maharaj, for the first time, wore a rich *jamo, surval,* ornaments and a crown. Then Maharaj sat on a swing. The next day Maharaj held a *chorashi*, in which he fed the Brahmins and donated to them.

Maharaj left there and arrived in Junagadh. The Chaitra *sud* 9, Hari Navmi, festival was celebrated in Junagadh. After blessing the devotees of Sorath, Maharaj made his way to Kalvani. Here he inquired about the *satsang* activities from the various sadhus coming from the different regions. The sadhus informed him about the plundering of the almshouses and the harassment from the *bawas*. The sadhus said, "Maharaj we can tolerate the abuses, beatings, plundering and even when they pull out our sacred thread, *kanthi* and puja. But these naked *bawas* send their women attendants to harass us." Then they talked in detail about how which individual sadhus were beaten. Maharaj was pained to hear all this.

The sadhus were not afraid of abuses, insults or beatings. They endured all these harassments. But the greatest trouble they saw was in the contact of the women attendants. The *bawas* were deliberately sending the women to the sadhus to snatch their *kanthis* and puja to break their vow of *brahmacharya* make them observe a fast.

Maharaj could not stand this harassment of his sadhus. He said, "Today I shall give you such a dress that nobody shall be able to really identify you."

Maharaj made five hundred sadhus give up their *shikha* and sacred thread. He made them adopt the dharma of sannyasis. He gave them the vow of *mansi puja*. He initiated them all as sannyasis and made them wear a robe. He stopped giving *bhagwati diksha*, *kanthi* and puja to sadhus and told the *paramhansas* to travel about without determining any destination.

What was the attraction of this young spiritual head of twenty-five that great sadhus, who for years had been following the *varnashram dharma* for sadhus, gave up their *shikha*, sacred thread and became *paramhansas* at his bidding? This was a unique incident in the religious history of the world. Nobody opposed the idea and by the mere word of Maharaj they became *paramhansas*. This speaks volumes for Maharaj's divine and magnetic personality.

From then onwards, our sadhus did not remain identifiable from the other sadhus. People started calling the *paramhansas* as *mundias*.

Maharaj did not stop at that. He preached, "Observe a fast on seeing a woman, never stretch your legs while sleeping, take chilled water from the earthern pot for

early morning bath in the winter and while meditating, even if a snake or scorpion bites you, you should not stir." Thus, he frequently changed the difficult vows to test the *paramhansas*. But the *paramhansas* passed all these tough tests with a smile on their faces.

CHAPTER 7

1. The Greatness of Mulji Bhakta

During the course of his travels Maharaj reached Bhadra.

Maharaj's meals were scheduled at the houses of the devotees in turn. One day, Maharaj asked Vashrambhai, "To whose house are we going for meals today?" Vashrambhai replied, "Maharaj, you are eating at Mulji Sharma's house today." Maharaj replied, "Come on then, let us go now to Mulji's house." They went to Mulji Bhakta's house before the scheduled time.

Mulji Bhakta had gone to his field. His mother, Sakarba, received Maharaj and placed a cushion on a cot and requested him to sit on it. Vashrambhai, Dosabhai, Ratanbhai and other devotees also sat near Maharaj. Then Maharaj spoke to Sakarba, "Mother, does your Mulji ever remember me?" Sakarba replied, "Maharaj, he remembers you incessantly, day and night; and in all his states. He does not forget you even for a moment. When you were being given the sacred thread, he had asked me to sing bhajans for the occasion. When you left home, he had told me that the Master of Akshardham was leaving home and would wander in the forests. Thus, since childhood, my Mulji has been remembering you." Maharaj then observed, "This Mulji is my divine abode, the eternal Aksharbrahman. Sakarba! When he was in your womb, before that and even today he saw and continues to see my *murti* constantly. Since eternity, we have been close. Since taking birth, I have been constantly thinking of Mulji. He is attached to me and I am continually attached to him.

"The ten avatars, four *vyuhas*, twenty-four *murtis,* and Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv live in one *brahmand*. Infinite such *brahmands* are sustained by Mulji. Mulji Bhakta is above Mul Maya, Mul Purush and he has come to you as your son. He is eternal Aksharbrahman. He is *Sat-chit-anand.* Those who come into contact with Mulji and attain the *brahmic* state attain *atyantik mukti*.

"In his form as my abode, Akshardham, Mulji is luminous, *nirgun* and *gunatit*. Although he beholds my *murti* and innumerable *muktas*, he is eternally present to serve me in a manifest form. Mulji is doer yet he is above the influence of actions and is completely free from all the attachments.

"When you realize the real meaning of Akshar and by his company attain the state like that of Aksharbrahman, then only will you understand the fullest glory of Purushottam, who is above even Akshar."

Sakarba, after listening to this divine speech, observed, "Maharaj, after all I am a woman; I find it very difficult to understand this philosophy. But I can say that whatever you are saying is true." Just then, Mulji Bhakta arrived. Maharaj sat with him and took his meals and gave *prasad* to Mulji Bhakta.

Maharaj stayed in Bhadra for one month and bestowed divine bliss upon the

devotees and convinced them that Mulji Sharma was his divine abode Aksharbrahman. Then, on Kartak *sud* 3, he left Bhadra and made his way to Kutch.

2. Initiation to Eighteen Devotees

Maharaj remembered the boastful words of Sunderji Suthar. Maharaj, the destroyer of ego, was toying with some plan.

Before leaving Bhadra, Maharaj wrote a letter to eighteen householder devotees, including Sura Khachar, Alaiya Khachar, Amro Patgar and others. It was addressed to wealthy landlords and Darbars. Maharaj wrote, "On reading this letter, renounce your homes, go to Jetalpur and take initiation from Ramdas Swami. From there you should go to Kashi and report to me at Bhuj on your return." This letter was sent to the homes of all the eighteen devotees through a special messenger.

From Bhadra Maharaj went to Bhuj. After some days, the group of the newly initiated *paramhansas* arrived with Ramdas Swami in Bhuj. Maharaj prostrated before them and went half way to receive them. Maharaj introduced each one of them to Sunderji Suthar and said, "Each one of them is the owner of upto five, twenty-five or fifty villages. Just by reading my letter they have renounced everything and like pet doves have rushed here."

Sunderji Suthar could not check his tears when he heard this. His ego was reduced to ashes and he understood the significance of Maharaj's words. He recalled his remark which he had made at Bandhiya and asked for forgiveness.

Maharaj then gave a fresh command to the new *paramhansas*. He ordered them to remove the garbs of a renunciant and put on the clothes of a householder.

But, Kalyanbhai, a youth from the village Kadu had read the word 'etc.' in Maharaj's letter and had thought that this referred to him and he too was to follow the command. As per Maharaj's order, all the devotees left their homes and went to Ramdas Swami. Maharaj gave darshan to Ramdas Swami in a dream and instructed him to come with the new *paramhansas* directly to Bhuj. So he was named Adbhutanand Swami by Maharaj and given permission to stay.

Maharaj blessed the devotees of Bhuj and set out on a tour of the Kutch region. At Mandvi Maharaj defeated Khaiya Khatri, a renowned scholar, in a debate. So, he became a disciple of Maharaj.

3. Opposed Killings During the Yagnas

In Bhuj there lived a Brahmin called Jagjivan Mehta. He was one of the eight ministers in the court of the King of Bhuj. Jagjivan followed the Shakti Panth and worshipped Mataji. He arranged a Shatchandi Yagna. There was going to be much killing in the *yagna*. With a view to win the favour of the goddess he had decided to sacrifice many goats and sheep.

The Brahmins began to chant Vedic mantras before beginning the sacrifice rituals. The flames rose high from the *yagna* pit. The goats were kept ready for the sacrifice. Vermilion had been applied to their heads and garlands placed round their necks. Jagjivan had invited Maharaj to grace the *yagna*.

Maharaj came to know about the killing of the innocent animals. His heart was filled with pity. He felt that the principles of the Vedas were being flouted and twisted. With a view to establish the correct principles of the Vedas and to establish the practice of *yagnas* without animal sacrifices, and to save the lives of the innocent creatures, Maharaj went to Jagjivandas's *yagna* arena. Maharaj talked about the tenets of Sanatan Dharma and the qualities of sadhus and Brahmins. Then, quoting mantras from the Vedas, he built up a case in favour of *yagnas* without sacrifice.

Maharaj declared, *"Ajena yajet."* He explained the meaning and said, "This does not mean that goats should be sacrificed in the *yagnas*. The word *aja* means rice which is four to five years old and is not good for sowing purposes. Therefore, true Brahmins should always perform *sattvik yagnas*, by offering things such as rice, barley, ghee, coconuts, sesame seeds, etc. These are the eternal principles of the Vedas. You can never win the favour of God by sacrificing animals." Maharaj based his arguments on the scriptures. Jagjivan argued a lot, but eventually he had to bow down before the logical and precise scriptural arguments of Maharaj. Maharaj won the scriptural debate, and established the practice of *yagnas* sans animal sacrifices.

But the ignorant and demonaic Jagjivan refused to see the truth, so Maharaj left the *yagna* arena.

4. Made Brahmachari Sit with Him

Maharaj was on his way to Vandhiya in Kutch. He was accompanied by Mukund Brahmachari. They met some robbers on the way. Maharaj made Brahmachari part with whatever food he had. The robbers could not find anything else, so they took the food. After walking for some time, Maharaj said to Brahmachari, "Brahmachari, I am terribly hungry, please give me some *sukhdi* if you have. I won't be able to walk further without food." Brahmachari replied, "Although the robbers did not want the food, you forced me to give it away to them. Now you are asking me to give you some food. Where do I get it from?"

Maharaj replied, "Now it is impossible for me to walk without food." Maharaj stood there. Just then a Kanbi Patel passed by rding an empty cart. Brahmachari approached him and requested him to stop his cart. The driver agreed to sit Maharaj. Maharaj asked Brahmachari to sit by his side in the cart, but, observing the duties of a servant, Brahmachari did not accept the offer and continued to follow the cart on foot. The cart was being pulled by two bullocks and was running at great speed, thus leaving Brahmachari behind. So Maharaj put the load of the entire *brahmand* into the cart, which did not allow the bullocks to pull it further. The Patel tried his best to start the cart, but the bulls would not budge. The Patel was puzzled.

Then Maharaj said to the Patel, "Patel, that bearded sadhu (Brahmachari) knows some black magic. He has stopped the cart. If you make him sit in the cart, then it will be able to move. If he refuses to sit, pull him forcefully into your cart."

The Patel pursuaded Brahmachari to sit in his cart. At last the cart began to roll again. Maharaj got down near a *dharmashala* at Vandhiya and ate *sukhdi* at the Patel's house. Thus, Maharaj often used to play such tricks.

5. Practised What He Preached

Often, Maharaj first practised whatever commands he gave to the *paramhansas*. He always set an example for others to emulate.

Once, at village Tera, he commanded the *paramhansas*, "From today, all *paramhansas* should collect alms from the houses of the three higher classes only. You should collect *rotla*, *khichdi,* etc., and then put it all in a piece of cloth and then dip the food into water till it becomes so tasteless that even dogs will not touch it. Then each *paramhansa* should eat one morsel."

Hearing this, some of the *paramhansas* doubted, "How can we eat food cooked by anybody and everybody?" Govind Swami, in particular, was not prepared to ask for such alms. In fact, he was opposed to asking for such alms. However, Maharaj believed that after becoming a *paramhansa* one should not have pride for one's *varna* or *ashram*.

That morning Maharaj himself accompanied some *paramhansas* to collect alms. He accepted whatever cooked food he received till noon. Then he went to a well along with the *paramhansas*, and dipped the bag of alms thrice in the water. Then he made balls of food and ate one ball himself and gave one ball each to the *paramhansas*. Govind Swami was stunned to see this. When they saw their *ishtadev* doing this, everyone's pride and ego disappeared. They all decided to obey Maharaj. Thus, Maharaj himself started this new practice.

6. Rigorous Tests for the Sadhus

Maharaj sent certain sadhus to Gujarat with Muktanand Swami for the spread of *satsang*.

The sadhus reached Ahmedabad, where they stayed at Dariyakhan Ghummat. When they begged for alms, certain bad people used to drop dead mice, lizards, onions, garlic and other refuse into their alms bags. Naturally, they had to throw away the alms and observe a fast. Often, each one of them would get less than 100 grams of food. Whatever little food they received, was washed and turned into balls before eating. Once, the sadhus received some stale food in alms. As a result, they fell seriously ill.

There was such oneness between Maharaj and the *paramhansas* that when this incident took place, although Maharaj was at Bhuj, he too fell ill. Such was his oneness with his *paramhansas* and devotees.

A group of about 150 sadhus had gone to Jamnagar. They had camped outside the city on the banks of the river. They received maize flour, millet, *juvar*, rice and *kodra* in alms. They would clean everything, place it all in a cloth, soak it in water, make balls out of it and give one to each *paramhansa*. At times, they had less than 50 grams each or just a morsel of food for their meals. The sadhus informed Maharaj about their hardships through a devotee.

After some days, Maharaj wrote a reply with a devotee: "In a certain town there lived a *sadguru*. Everyday he received 500 grams of rice from the town. The *sadguru* ate this rice and carried out his duties. A *mumukshu* came to him to become his disciple. The *sadguru* said to this seeker, 'Look here, I get 500 grams of rice daily. I cook it and it is just sufficient for me. It is very difficult to get alms here.' The disciple replied,

'Guruji, don't worry about me. I shall drink the excess water in which you boil the rice.' So saying, the seeker stayed to serve the *sadguru*.

"After some time, another seeker came to the guru and expressed his desire to stay with him as his disciple. The guru told him how he and his disciple just managed to survive. So this seeker replied, 'Guruji, don't worry. I shall drink the water with which you wash the rice before cooking and stay in your service.' He too stayed there to serve the master.

"Then a third seeker came. He too wanted to stay with the guru and seek communion with him. The guru explained to him how he and his two disciples subsisted. The third seeker replied, 'Guruji, I will eat what is left in your plate and the water with which you wash your hands, and I shall serve you. Do not worry about me. I want to learn *satsang* from you.' Thus the three seekers lived in this way with the *sadguru*.

'In comparison your difficulties are nothing. Therefore, if you are genuinely seeking ultimate salvation then the difficulties are of no consequence and one can worship God,' concluded Shriji Maharaj.

When the sadhus read this letter, they forgot their difficulties and felt recharged to carry on their spiritual work. A sadhu who had come from the Tailang region lived on the leaves discarded by the greengrocers, who used to wash their vegetables in the river. Some sadhus lived on just green moss. They spent five days like this.

On the fifth day, the King of Jamnagar happened to pass by. From a distance he saw the emaciated sadhus collecting and eating green moss. He felt pity. He learnt from his servant that they were sadhus of Swaminarayan. Thus he felt more respect for them. He sent his servant with a message, "Tell the sadhus to come and stay in our palace. We shall supply all their needs. Let them happily worship in our palace."

The *sadguru* of the group replied, "We cannot go to a place where we receive honour. We can't stay there. Pomp and luxury do not befit us. Therefore, we are unable to come." The servant replied, "It will be considered as an insult to the king." The *sadguru* replied, "We don't mean any disrespect or insult to the King. But we cannot disobey this command of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. If this is taken as an insult by the king, he might ask us to quit this place. In that case, we will go to some other place and worship God happily."

The servant was completly stunned on hearing this. He patiently explained everything to the king. The king was further impressed by this. He sent foodstuff to different shops and homes and told them to keep it on his behalf. Through them, he gave alms to the sadhus. This happened for two days.

The chief *sadguru*, observed, "We cannot stay at a place where we are offered such food daily. Rich food causes attachment, so we must leave." On the third day, the sadhus set off for some other place.

Maharaj had made it obligatory for the sadhus to talk to five aspirants daily and convince them to join *satsang* before taking food. The sadhus used to walk and talk with the farmers, while they tilled their fields. But often, in spite of their sincere efforts, they would fail to make five new *satsangis*, and as a result, they had to observe

a fast. Maharaj learnt about this. So he told them to try to initiate five aspirants into Satsang before sunset. If five seekers could not be found before sunset, they should give *vartman* to a tree before taking water.

Maharaj left Kutch and made his way to Jhinjavadar.

7. O Carrots!

Maharaj arrived at Jhinjavadar, Alaiya Khachar's town. Maharaj started a new practice. He instructed everyone to meditate before taking meals. After the food had been served, the 'Jai' would be hailed and everyone would keep their eyes closed and feel for the food in the plate. Only the first item they touched was to be eaten and nothing else.

The clock struck twelve. All sat for their meals. They shut their eyes, meditated and then Maharaj called the 'Jai'. Sura Khachar touched the pickled carrots which was too salty and had too much hot pepper. As soon as he put one piece of carrot into his mouth he started to hiccup. Water started running down from his eyes and his hair stood on end. What could he do? He drank some water and his hiccups eventually stopped. Then Sura Khachar started singing: "O dear, these carrots are my enemies...." On hearing this, Maharaj burst into laughter. Maharaj asked him, "How did you enjoy the dish?" Sura Khachar replied jokingly, "Maharaj, everyone should share in this pleasure!" Maharaj showed mercy and allowed him to eat *dudhpak*.

8. Realization Comes to a Pathan

A Pathan serving in the Junagadh army was passing through the outskirts of Jhinjavadar. There, he experienced peace in his heart. All his thoughts stopped and he beheld a rare radiance coming from all directions. He thought, "The peace which I did not feel even after my pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, I am experiencing now. I am sure there must be some divine fakir in this town." With such thoughts, he entered the town. He asked Alaiya Khachar, who was walking towards him, "Is there a divine fakir in this town?" Alaiya Khachar replied, "Come on, I will show you." With these words he led the Pathan to the Ramji Mandir where a *bawa* was smoking his hookah. But the Pathan was not satisfied. Then Alaiya Khachar led the Pathan to Maharaj.

As soon as the Pathan saw Maharaj, he was convinced that he was the divine one. He bowed down and offered his *namaz* before Maharaj. Maharaj put him in a samadhi in which he had darshan of eighty thousand *pegambers*. He addressed Maharaj as '*Khudatala*' and offered his prayers. "Please keep me in your service," requested the Pathan. Maharaj replied, "Go home and keep this *murti* in your heart. I will grant you *kalyan* and will come to take you at the end." The Pathan offered his respects and departed.

Then Maharaj set out for Kariyani.

CHAPTER 8

1. A Dumb Recites The Vedas

Since 1861 ce, Maharaj had undertaken the great humanitarian work of clearing the Ramkund, Bhimkund and the lake in Kariyani. In 1865, when the work was completed Maharaj performed the Maharudra and Vishnu Yagna during the months of Bhadrapad and Aso. The rituals concluded on Aso *vad* 13. For forty days, thousands of Brahmins, sadhus and devotees were served with rich food. The Brahmins were also given gifts.

From Gadhada Maharaj went to the Charotar region, for *satsang*. He visited many towns and villages before arriving at Umreth via Vartal. Here, Maharaj stayed at the Jagnath Mahadev Mandir. All the Brahmins came for darshan of Maharaj out of curiosity.

When they saw Maharaj, they thought, "We should test the divinity of Maharaj." They bowed to Maharaj and said, "We worship Shankar and are the followers of Shankaracharya. Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya had made a buffalo recite the Vedas. If you can show a miracle like that we will believe you as God."

Maharaj replied, "Well, a buffalo is an animal. If you can bring a Brahmin who from birth is dumb and illiterate like a buffalo, I will make him recite the Vedas."

The Brahmins summoned a Brahmin boy called Harishankar who was dumb and illiterate. He was made to sit in front of Maharaj. No sooner had Maharaj glanced at him then, like rapidly popping corn, Harishankar started singing mantras from all the four Vedas without any mistake in pronunciation or in their tunes. The Brahmins were convinced that Maharaj was God.

All the Brahmins became the disciples of Maharaj. But when could *vartman* be offered to so many Brahmins? Everyday there would be a big crowd. So Maharaj solved the problem in his own unique manner. He asked for a pot full of water and walked through the town, sprinkling the water on the houses and declared, "Those persons on whose house the holy water is sprinkled should consider themselves to have been offered *vartman*." Thus after spreading *satsang* in Umreth, Maharaj returned to Vartal.

2. Learn Sanskrit

Some of Maharaj's *paramhansas* were poets. They used to compose poems, bhajans and verses. But they were lacking in one thing.

Once, Maharaj instructed Atmanand Swami to go to the villages for preaching. He was not very learned, but he surpassed others in his actions and saintliness. He was always eager to carry out the commands of Maharaj. Therefore, Atmanand Swami was known as *vachanni murti* – one who obeyed all of Maharaj's orders.

During his travels, he arrived in Jamnagar. In those days, Jamnagar was known as Chhoti Kashi, since it was a famous centre of scriptural study. Some learned Brahmins

and scholars came to know that a Swaminarayan sadhu had come for preaching. They went to Atmanand Swami for religious discussion. They asked Atmanand Swami, “What is your form?” Atmanand Swami replied, “The commands of my guru.”

The Brahmins thought that Atmanand Swami had not understood their question so they repeated, “What is your form?”

Atmanand Swami replied, “The command of the guru is the essence of all the shastras.” The scholar Brahmins ridiculed Atmanand Swami by saying, “He is a dunce, a fool.”

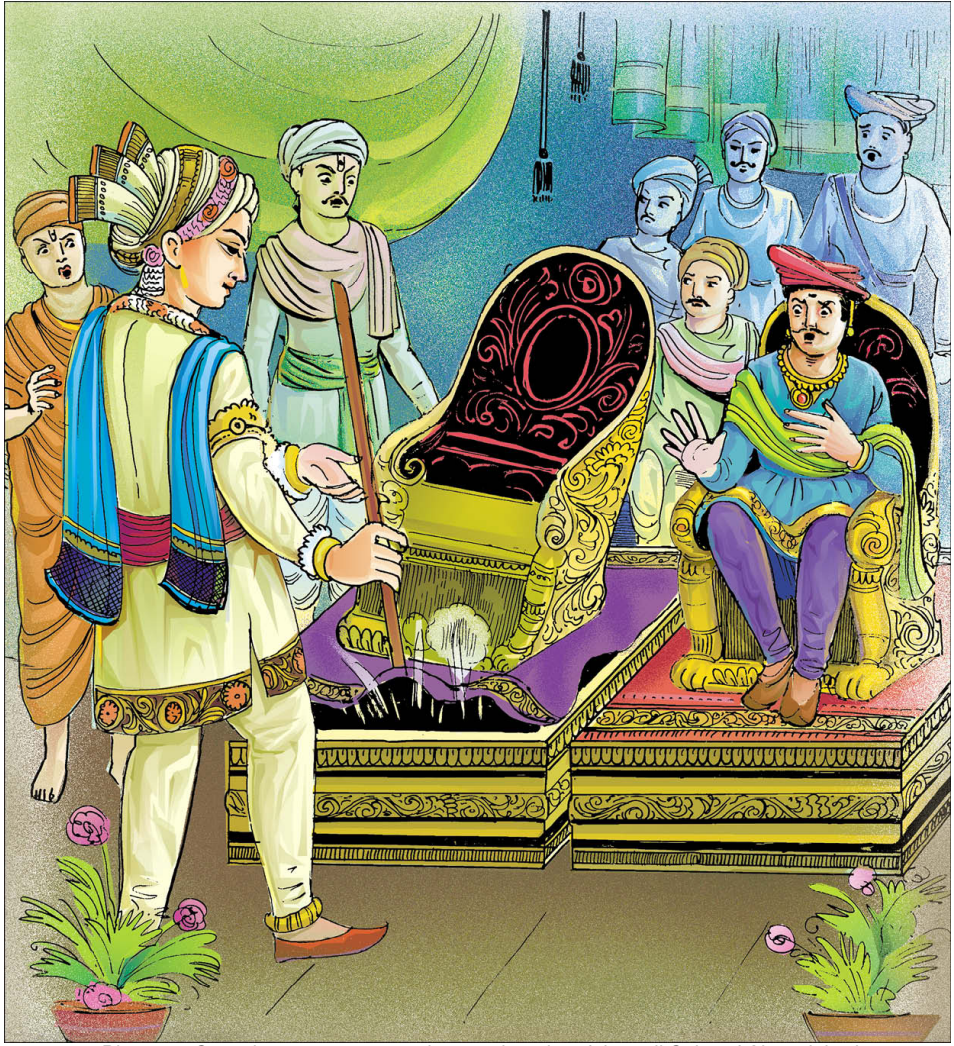
When Maharaj came to Jetalpur for the grand *yagna*, he learned about this episode. He realized that this was a great mistake. He soon decided to meet the requirement. He commanded many young and old sadhus to learn Sanskrit and local languages. Over a period of time, Nityanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Shukanand Swami, Shatanand Swami, Bhagvadanand Swami, Vasudevanand Brahmachari, Nishkamanand Brahmachari and many other sadhus became scholars in Sanskrit, other languages and the scriptures. So many sadhus were sent to Surat for the study of Sanskrit. Maharaj tested the sadhus after they had completed their studies, and he honoured and encouraged them by giving a sanctified holy relic as a memento.

As a result, the Sampraday became enriched with many original and independent scholarly commentaries by the learned *paramhansas* on the Gita, the Upanishads, Vedanta Sutras, Shrimad Bhagvat, Shandilya Sutra and other shastras. They produced many great original works in Sanskrit like Satsangijivan, Harivakya Sudha Sindhu, Satsangi Bhushan, Harililakalpataru, Shri Hari Digvijay and many others.

Similarly, in the field of music the *paramhansas* initially composed bhajans which were tuned after the fashion of *deshi raag* and *dhaal* (folk tunes) but had no touch of Indian classical music. Therefore, Maharaj instructed Premanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Bhumanand Swami, Devanand Swami and many others to master classical music. Many *paramhansas* attained mastery in vocal and instrumental music. They played instruments like the sitar, *sarod, sarangi, tabla,* etc. As a result a rich treasure of thousands of *padas* (compositions) composed in various *raags* are widely available throughout the Sampraday. All these compositions were sung by the *paramhansas* in the presence of Maharaj.

In those days these *paramhansas* of Maharaj had earned great fame and name as distinguised singers and musicians.

3. Non-Violent Yagna at Jetalpur



Bhagwan Swaminarayan exposes the cunning plot of the evil Suba of Ahmedabad

Maharaj had planned a *yagna* on a grand scale at Jetalpur. He was staying in the mansion by the town lake. It was decided to commence the *yagna* eight days before Makar Sankranti (January 14) and conclude it ten days after this auspicious day. Thus for eighteen days the Maharudra Yagna was to take place. Maharaj had decided to arrange a *chorashi* – ceremonial dinner for all Brahmins. Maharaj had invited about one lakh Brahmins from all over Gujarat, Kutch and Saurashtra. He had decided to use 500 *maunds* of ghee, ordered hundred cartloads of jaggery and had the required flour milled in every house of the town.

At the time of the *yagna*, he conducted religious discussions opposing the animal sacrifices made by some in *yagnas* and convinced people that this was not the practice in *yagnas* sanctioned by the shastras. He interpreted the Vedas in their true spirit and preached against violence in *yagnas*. For eighteen days holy and scholarly Brahmins sang the Vedic verses and performed the rituals of the Maharudra Yagna. Certain

jealous and mean-minded Brahmins created many problems and threw away sweets and ghee into the lake in an attempt to disrupt the *yagna* and embarrass Maharaj. However, nobody succeeded in obstructing the *yagna*. The ceremonies were concluded unobstructed. Maharaj gave gold *mahors* to the Brahmins as *dakshina* before seeing them off.

The jealous Brahmins and Mat-Panthis could do no harm. Maharaj concluded the ceremonies and came to Ahmedabad.

Soon after the *yagna*, the father of the Suba (Collector) of Ahmedabad died. At that time a man called Vitthalbhan was the Suba of Ahmedabad. The disgruntled Brahmins and Mat-Panthis decided to exploit this incident. They approached the Suba and tried to provoke him against Maharaj. They ascribed the sudden death of his father to the *yagna*. They told him, "Look here, Sahajanand is a Shudra. He has no right to perform *yagnas*. Moreover, no animal sacrifice was offered in the *yagna*, and as a result the presiding goddess of your city has become angry. He has deliberately provoked her. With a view to get your father killed, he had organized such an unholy and non-Vedic *yagna*. Sahajanand has established himself as a guru by preaching to the Brahmins. If you will allow such *adharma* to spread, your Peshwa Empire shall disappear.

The Suba was easily taken in and became very angry with Maharaj. He decided to get Maharaj killed. He hatched a plot and invited Maharaj to his court in the Bhadra area of Ahmedabad.

The Suba got a tank constructed and filled it with boiling oil. He put a plank on it and placed a beautiful throne on it. Everything was arranged so meticulously that no one would suspect the foul play. Maharaj came to the court followed by his sadhus. The gateman stopped them saying nobody except Maharaj could enter the court. But, Devanand Swami '*dandi*' pushed the gateman aside and followed Maharaj.

Nothing could be concealed from the omniscient Maharaj. The wicked Suba, with an insincere smile on his face, requested Maharaj to take the special seat. But Maharaj replied, "We are sadhus, we don't need such decorated seats." With these words, he pressed the throne with his stick and, with a great thud, the throne fell into the tank below, which was full of hot oil. The oil splashed out and fumes started rising from the tank. The Suba was completely exposed in the court and his plot had boomeranged. Maharaj declared, "God will not tolerate such injustice." Devanand Swami was on the point of giving a curse. As soon as he opened his mouth to say *'Dattan so pattan ker daalun* (Let your kingdom be crushed to the grounds)', Maharaj checked him. The crestfallen and angry Suba was greatly agitated. His ego was hurt. He angrily ordered, "This very moment, leave the city of Ahmedabad through the Idar gate and do not come to the city again."

Maharaj cooly asked, "How long should I not visit your city?"

The vain Suba replied, "As long as Peshwas continue to rule Ahmedabad, you should never enter the city again."

(History reveals that in Samvat 1874 (1818 ce), the Peshwa rule ended and Ahmedabad came under the British rule.)

4. The Nuisance of Lolangar

Bhagvan Swaminarayan's sadhus are harrassed by Lolangar and his bawas

Kathi devotees said, "Maharaj, you talked about the great *yagna* you performed at Jetalpur, but we did not get such an opportunity." Maharaj replied, "Well, we will do another big *yagna* this year."

With these words, Maharaj, followed by some five hundred Kathi devotees and three hundred sadhus, left Kathiawad. He broke his journey at Khokhra Mehmadavad. A *bawa* called Lolangar lived here. He tied an iron chain round his waist so he was known as Lolangar Bawa (*loh* means iron, and *langar* means chain). He was instigated by Raghunathdas against Maharaj. His disciples saw the sadhus. Knowing that the disciples of Jivanmukta were not carrying any arms, Lolangar's thousand followers attacked the sadhus.

Maharaj as a last resort sent Kathi devotees to protect the sadhus. With a one swift stroke, Bhaguji felled the leader of Bawas and the Kathis controlled the situation. They

freed the sadhus. The *bawas* were no match against the skill and courage of the Kathis. Many were killed, many were injured and the rest escaped. After giving medical aid to the sadhus, Maharaj sent them to Surat. Considering it unsafe there, Maharaj left for Vahelal in the company of some sadhus and Kathi devotees.

5. The End of Jagjivan

From Vahelal Maharaj went to Kutch. Before reaching Bhuj, Maharaj visited Adhoi and Bhachau.

In Bhuj he stayed with Sunderji Suthar. At that time Maharaj had a blister on the toe of his right foot. The infection had become severe and the entire leg had swollen. He had a throbbing pain in his leg, so he remained upstairs. He would not come down at all. At that time Sunderji Suthar had a fever. Jagjivan Mehta came there to inquire of the health of Sunderji. Maharaj had once stopped Jagjivan from doing animal sacrifice and so he harboured a grudge against Maharaj.

He used to speak low about Maharaj. To ridicule Maharaj he called one of his bulls Sahajanand. The fact that his wife, Prabhavati, had become a devotee of Maharaj had made him more jealous.

After inquiring of the health of Sunderji, Jagjivan asked him, “Where is Sahajanand at present?”

Sunderji Suthar hesitated for a while, but soon appeared Maharaj on the staircase and said, “Here I am. I am here only. I am coming to you.” With these words Maharaj came down.

Jagjivan sarcastically asked Maharaj, “Are you God? Are you the husband of Radha and Lakshmi?”

“Yes, I am that Sat-chid-anand Parabrahman Purushottam. I am the husband of Radha and Lakshmi. The scriptures proclaim my praise and glory.” Jagjivan fumed with anger when he heard Maharaj’s reply, stamped his feet and walked away.

Afterwards, Jagjivan dispatched a troop of Arabs and said, “Seize Sahajanand and bring him here.”

But Maharaj learned about this, so he went and stayed with Gangaram the wrestler. The Arabs came to the wrestler’s house. On Maharaj’s bidding, Gangaram sent his brother to give this news to Jamadar Fateh Mohemad. As Jagjivan had sent the troops without his order, Fateh Mohemed sent his own troops and asked Jagjivan’s troops to go away. This frustrated Jagjivan. He quarrelled with Jagjivan in the midst of the market. In the ensuing duel, Jagjivan was fatally injured and met a cruel end. Thus, the evil Jagjivan reaped the harvest of his sins. From then onwards there was a congenial atmosphere for *satsangis* in Kutch.

CHAPTER 9

1. I Want to Liberate Them All

Maharaj was on his way to the river Ghela for his evening bath. He was accompanied by half a dozen sadhus and four to five devotees. They met a Kanbi farmer who was absentmindedly speedily walking towards his farm. His shoulder brushed against Maharaj's. The farmer sped away without caring as to 'who he had pushed'. Mulji Brahmachari was following Maharaj carrying a small waterpot) in his hand. He held the farmer by his wrist, stopped him and said, "Can't you see? Are you blind? You collided with our God?"

The farmer said, "Maybe I am blind, but is your God also blind that he did not see me? During Ramavtar and Krishnavatar we were isolated. The monkeys and shepherds were liberated but we were forgotten."

Maharaj was listening to this dialogue. He resolved, "I want to liberate these Kanbis and even all the lower class people. I want to uplift all of them. No one is to be left out this time."

Indeed this is what Maharaj did. He uplifted Kanbi, Koli, Sai, Suthar, Luhar (blacksmiths), Kadiya (masons), Mochi (cobblers), Vaghri, Dhed (untouchables), Gola, Ghanchi, Kumbhar (potters), Soni, Mali, Kansara, Salat, Barbers, Bhil, Bharwad, Ahir, Mer and innumerable other neglected people. Not only did he take them into the Satsang fold, but infused in them high and holy ideals and good qualities of the advanced classes like Brahmin, Vaishya and Kshatriya. He made their lives pure, and taught them to be addiction-free, fearless, moral, pious and people of good character. He produced gems like well-known devotees from not only among these low classes but also from Muslims like Khojas, Vohras and Pathans. Even English officials came into his fold, and led pure and pious lives.

Once, Maharaj was in Akshar Ordi. Maharaj sat on a cot and asked Mulji Sheth, "How good are you at arithmetic?" Mulji Sheth replied, "Maharaj, I know as much as is required on this earth."

Maharaj repeated the question, "How far can you count upto?"

Mulji Sheth replied, "Maharaj, I can count upto a figure with seventeen zeros."

On hearing this Maharaj said, "But we want to liberate infinite number of people, right now. We want to liberate all the *mumukshus* on this earth. All those who come into contact with our sadhus or devotees, those who offer them water or accept water from them, those who feed them or accept their food and those who serve them – I want to liberate all of them. I want them all to be born in Satsang and thus offer to them *atyantik kalyan*.

All the devotees and sadhus were greatly impressed by Maharaj's all-embracing wish of bringing happiness to one and all – big and small, high and low. They were all

convinced of the divine purpose and will behind his kindly descent on this earth.

2. Yagna at Dabhan

Dabhan is a small town in the Kheda district. Kheda district was under the jurisdiction of the British, so Maharaj sought the permission of the British to hold a *yagna*. The British not only agreed to the proposal but promised to give all possible help for the function. In Dabhan, the Maharudra Yagna was conducted for eighteen days. Thousands of Brahmins were served food. However, some of the mischievous Brahmins poured ghee into a lake and then complained that there wasn't sufficient ghee. "Ghee is needed. Ghee is in short supply," they cried. Maharaj went to the storeroom and touched two containers of ghee with his hand and observed, "Keep on drawing ghee from these two containers. It will not run out." Maharaj deployed all the Kathis on all four sides of the camp. He asked the *satsangi* Brahmins to keep a watch on the stores, and *yagna-mandap*. *Satsangi* Brahmins went on drawing ghee but the supply never ran out. They were wonderstruck by the divine power of Maharaj.

During the *yagna* ceremony, one Joban Pagi came to steal the mare belonging to Maharaj. But Maharaj gave him the darshan of his divine *murti* near each and every horse, transforming Joban's mind and making him a *satsangi*.

The *yagna* finished unobstructed. The conclusion of the *yagna* was on day of Poshi Punam and at that time Maharaj initiated Mulji Sharma of Bhadra into the sadhu-fold and gave him the name Gunatitanand Swami. Then Maharaj declared to assembly, "This young sadhu is my eternal Akshardham, my dwelling place. He incessantly beholds my *murti*, and he is my most beloved devotee." Thus, Maharaj revealed the true form and glory of Gunatitanand Swami and Veja Raval sang many bhajans in various *raags* before Maharaj.

At the end of the *yagna* ceremony, Maharaj was taken out in a procession on a saffron-coloured horse. He had put on golden clothes wrought in threads of gold and silver and had ornaments of gold.

"Var nirguna re, thayā brahmarup,
Āve chhe anup, Suramuni bhup,
Shobhe lāl survāl, jari jāmā shāl,
Kanthe moti mālā, bharelā bhavāni re...."

Nishkulanand Swami had composed and sang this bhajan to commemorate the occasion.

3. 'Have Mercy on Us'

After the *yagna* in Dabhan Maharaj came to the Kutch district. He stayed in Bhuj and celebrated the Fuldol festival there. From around so many devotees had come there. Lastly, on the day of departure, after performing puja of Maharaj at parting they said, "Maharaj! Have mercy on us."

Maharaj blessed and addressed them, "You, too, have mercy on us."

After touching his feet the devotees started homewards. On the way they thought, "Why had Maharaj asked us, 'You too have mercy on us'?" They asked one another

about the meaning of Maharaj's reply, but none could explain. So they returned from the outskirts of the town and stood before Maharaj with folded hands. "Maharaj you had told us, 'Please have mercy on us.' What is the meaning of this?"

Maharaj smiled and said, "Your body is three-and-a-half hands long. Therein is the *hridayakash*. I dwell there in the *jiva* as the witness. Therefore, keep your *antahkaran* clean. Do not allow the dirt of the world to enter your heart. I am watching all your actions while I am there. Therefore, keep your actions pious and pure. If your heart is pure, then only can I dwell there happily. Therefore, please be good enough to have good thought, speech and deeds. Please forever show this much favour to me."

This was a new lesson, for this served as a spur to their conscience. They assured Maharaj, "We shall live according to your commands and shall keep our thoughts, speech and actions pure." Maharaj was very pleased with them. They fell at the feet of Maharaj and with a firm resolve to live upto their word to Maharaj they started again homewards.

Thus, by a mere hint, Maharaj used to purify the speech and actions of his devotees.

4. Shriji Maharaj Attainable Through His Grace

Harbhamji Suthar and few other devotees walked for 28 miles to see Maharaj in Anjar, facing many hardships on the way. When they arrived they fell at the feet of Maharaj and said, "Jai Swaminarayan." But Maharaj did not even look at them. In fact, he turned his face away from them. He did not even acknowledge them by saying 'Jai Swaminarayan'. Maharaj usually asked about the well-being of the devotees, but not this time. The devotees felt, "We have come from such a long distance, facing so many hardships for nearly fifteen days to reach Maharaj. And without even asking 'how are you?' Maharaj has spurned us by facing away from us."

The devotees said, "Maharaj please be kind! Look at our efforts."

Maharaj replied, "What is your effort. It is nothing. Akshardham is beyond Prakruti-Purush and the eight cosmic layers. If we drop an iron ball weighing a lakh *maunds* from there, by the time it reaches here, the air will turn it into a speck of dust. Out of sheer grace I have come here to liberate you. I am living here as one of you and I am accepting your services. Great Rishis and sages have been performing austerities for thousands of years, yet I haven't appeared to them in their meditation. And here you can behold me with your eyes. Is this not enough grace? Isn't this sufficient?"

On hearing these heart-stirring words, the devotees forgot all about their hardships, realized their mistake and their inner vision opened up. They realized the true glory of Maharaj.

Then, while addressing the assembly, Maharaj said, "What great things have you done that may please me and make me come to this earth? Out of sheer grace I have come on this earth. The avatars of the past had blessed only those *mumukshus* who had sought their communion. Today, I have made no distinctionsbetween the *daivi* (divine) or *asuri* (evil), *mumukshus* (seekers) or common people. I have blessed them all alike. I have not held people's *swabhav* (nature) against them. Out of sheer mercy, I give the eternal bliss of darshan, *sparsh* (touch), *prasad* and talks. Thus, I, Parabrahman

Purushottam, have, through my grace, manifested on this earth and become available to you. So, you should not think that I am attainable through any other means."

The devotees and sadhus realized the great significance of their divine attainment *(prapti*). They said, "You are right Maharaj! This time, you have shown great mercy and showered limitless affection on us. We have gained the supreme attainment. Now we have nothing to do but to please you by following your commands. Therefore, O Maharaj, we are all simple people who know very little, please overlook our mistakes. Grant us strength to enable us to please you."

5. Sahajanand, The Just

Maharaj was *samdarshi* (just) in the true sense of the term. He never acted with partiality. He visited the huts of devotees like Sagram Vaghri with the same enthusiasm as he went to the palaces.

Maharaj was once addressing the congregation at Loya. When the religious discourse was in progress, Gangabai, who was from the Dhed community, came there. She had hearing the glory of Maharaj from a *satsangi*, and so had walked all the way from Chuda to Loya.

Some women from Chuda were present in the assembly. Maharaj told them, "Let this Gangabai sit in a corner by your side." The women started grumbling and making faces. Some of them turned their faces. Maharaj turned towards the wife of Sura Khachar and asked her, "Who disposes of the dead animals from your stables or cowsheds?"

She replied, "Maharaj! The Dheds do that job." Maharaj added further, "That means whenever a cow or horse or dog or some animal dies on your premises, you do allow Dheds to enter your house don't you? Then why are your grumbling here? Besides, this Gangabai is a *mumukshu*. In her last birth she was of the Nagar Brahmin community and was proud of her higher status in society. She never respected devotees from the lower classes. She used to dislike them. Therefore, this time she has become a Dhed by birth. If you show such class distinctions then you too shall be suffer a similar fate. Those who are proud of their *varna* (class) and *ashram* (stages of life) do not possess the qualities of saintliness. Therefore, one should not boast of one's *varna* or *ashram*."

Everyone understood this fact. Their bias subsided. They made room for Gangabai. All of them learnt a new lesson in life today.

CHAPTER 10

1. Darshan of Dharma-Bhakti

The period of Chaturmas was in progress. In Gadhada there was a passage between the rooms of Vasudev-Narayan and Dada Khachar. Maharaj used to sit near the door dividing the two rooms, and deliver his sermons. The women devotees sat near the room of Vasudev-Narayan.

One day, from the direction of Maharaj's seat the male devotees saw the spread of brilliant white light and the *murti* of Dharmadev. On the other side the women devotees beheld the *murti* of Bhaktidevi in heaven, amid cool red light. Then both lights merged into Maharaj. Everyone was wonderstruck. They talked to Maharaj about the vision they had.

Maharaj explained to them, "My nature is not to dwell anywhere for more than half a day, yet I have come here to live with you, because you have won me over. Therefore, you had a glimpse of my parents – Bhakti and Dharma. Now they too shall dwell here with us.

It so happened that Maharaj's storekeeper, Hasanbhai, had gone to Lathi. He saw a sculptor going with some twenty-six *murtis*, loaded in three carts. On seeing the *murtis*, he said to the sculptor, "Come with me to Gadhada and if our Maharaj likes your *murtis* we shall buy all of them." They came to Gadhada. Maharaj saw the *murtis* and decided to buy all of them, except the four *murtis* of Kalbhairav. So, Maharaj arranged payment to the sculptor for the twenty-two *murtis* and bid him farewell. Two of the *murtis* resembled the figures of Dharma and Bhakti.

Maharaj got the passage between the two rooms bricked and installed the *murtis* of Dharma and Bhakti with all rites and ceremonies.

2. Shobharam Becomes Blind

There was no let up in the jealous attitude of the opponents towards Maharaj and his *paramhansas*. They used to speak low and spread false rumours about Maharaj. Some of them used to say that with the help of the scriptures they were ready to prove that Swaminarayan was not God. Others said that the Swaminarayan Sampraday was not based on the Vedas and so was not a part of Hinduism. But none of their arguments could stand the scholarly arguments of the . The *mumukshus* followed the reality during their discussion with the *paramhansas* but the opponents continued to malign Maharaj and Satsang.

One such Brahmin lived in Visnagar. His name was Shobharam. He was learned but was jealous of Maharaj and the Satsang. In Visnagar he was criticising the Satsang in the presence of a *satsangi* named Baldevbhai. He said to Shobharam, "Shobharam, Swaminarayan is God. His glory and prowess are immense. He helps people attain

samadhi. He performs miracles everywhere and propagates the pure Vaishnav traditions. Therefore, be pure and seek shelter unto him. He will grant you salvation."

But Shobharam, who was very proud of his scholarship, roared, "If your Swaminarayan is worth the name, why does he not punish me when I have been attacking him in public? If he really is God, why does he not make me blind?" Baldev replied, "Shobharam, you don't know what you are inviting. Bhagwan Swaminarayan is *satyasankalp* – he fulfills everyone's wishes. Why are you inviting blindness? Why don't you ask for something good? Have you lost your senses?"

Shobharam arrogantly said, "Yes, I am boldly challenging your Swaminarayan Bhagwan to make me blind within eight days, if he is really God." The evil genius Shobharam made evil demands and within four days he lost his sight.

During the course of his travels, Maharaj came to Visnagar. He learnt from the *satsangis* about Shobharam's blindness. Compassionate Maharaj felt pity and remarked, "Really! Has he become blind on my account? Let me go in person to him and give him my darshan. Let me forgive him and restore his vision. Please send a word to him that Maharaj is calling on him."

But, as the saying reveals, 'Good sense is lost when a man is facing destruction'. Stupid Shobharam told the devotees, "I don't want to see your God." He posted two servants at the gate and refused to see Maharaj. With a heavy heart, Maharaj returned from his house, and Shobharam hurled his life into a bottomless pit of eternal darkness and missed the opportunity of having the *darshan* of God himself.

3. Gift of Vision

In Limbdi, Maharaj was a guest at Mulji Sheth's house. A cot was placed for Maharaj and the sadhus were also offered seats in the compound. Maharaj was making inquiries about the sadhus and devotees. At that time, a blind woman was seen entering Mulji Sheth's house, feeling the wall while walking. All the people were looking at Maharaj, but Maharaj saw the woman from a distance. Maharaj asked of Mulji Seth, who was sitting in front of him, pointing towards he woman, "Who is this woman, toiling alone?"

Mulji Sheth hesitantly replied, "Maharaj, she is my wife."

Maharaj observed, "Really! It is troublesome to be blind. The woes of a blind woman are endless. She has to do the household work and cooking. Again she must guard against insects and mites. She has forever, to depend on someone's assistance or help." Mulji Sheth replied, "Yes, Maharaj, but we are helpless. That's our destiny. We must suffer it. In this world so many blind people are living helplessly. Even in blindness people have to do business. How can they continue otherwise?" Maharaj observed. "It would have been good, if your wife had vision." Mulji Sheth replied, "Of course it would be better."

Meanwhile, Mulji Sheth's wife sent for him and said, "Maharaj has done us a great favour. Look, I can see everything. I am sighted. How beautiful Maharaj looks in his beautiful white *surval* and *pagh!* You too should change your dirty clothes and put on new ones and go and thank Maharaj that my vision has been restored by his mercy and

grace."

Mulji Sheth's joy knew no bounds. He put on new clothes and rushed outside. He fell at the feet of Maharaj and said, "Maharaj, you have done me a great favour. My wife can now see by your mercy and grace. You have illumined her life. She has been craving for your darshan for a long time. You are really *satyasankalp* (wish-fulfilling)."

Maharaj stayed at Mulji Sheth's house for some time. Mulji Sheth and his wife served Maharaj with great devotion and love and derived great pleasure from it.

Later on in his life, Mulji Sheth left everything and served as a manager to Shriji Maharaj.

CHAPTER 11

1. Test of Jiva Khachar

The month of Shravan was about to end. But in Sarangpur it had not rained. The fodder for cattle was in short supply. People approached Maharaj and prayed, “Maharaj! There has been no rain and the cattle are suffering. Please be merciful and kindly command Indra to send rain.”

Maharaj had his seat placed in the courtyard of Jiva Khachar and convened a meeting. He made the gathering meditate on his divine figure and chant the *dhun*. Yet not a cloud was to be seen in the sky. At night, Maharaj, while lying in bed, scolded Indra. So Indra became active. There was a great thunderstorm and it started raining heavily. There was such a heavy downpour that Jiva Khachar’s house was collapsing.

Maharaj then said to him, “I asked you not to take me to your house, yet you brought me. Now your house has fallen down. Where will you keep me?”

Jiva Khachar replied, “Maharaj! I will keep you in my newly constructed house. Let us go there.” Maharaj was covered in a blanket and was led to the newly built house of Jiva Khachar by Mukund Varni.

Inside the new house, Maharaj decided to test Jiva Khachar’s devotion. He said to him, “I feel hungry. Please serve me some hot food.” Jiva Khachar saw that the fuel (cow dung and firewood) and the stove (*chula*) were wet and unsuitable for cooking. So he broke the *kothis*, large containers of clay and dung, to constructed a new stove and chopped his new cot and used it as fuel. Fresh food was cooked for Maharaj. He ate the food and retired to bed.

At midnight there were cries for help, “Save us, save us. My house is coming down. The crossbeam has fallen down. Please rescue my children and cattle!” In the heavy rain and the crackle of lighting no one heard the cries, except Maharaj. He quietly got up, silently opened the door and made his way in the heavy rain to the house of Lakha and Deva Patel. He lifted the crossbeam onto his shoulder, allowing the ladies, children and cattle to come out safely. They were all saved from dying. Maharaj then returned to his bed and fell asleep.

By morning the whole village was knee-deep in water. When Maharaj sat for his morning bath, Mukund Varni, who was bathing Maharaj, saw a scar on Maharaj’s shoulder. He asked Maharaj about it. Maharaj narrated the night’s episode. The rain had stopped when Maharaj concluded his daily routine. The waters had receded from the town. Maharaj declared, “The sadhus had no food last night. We want to test the affection of the town. Today I will go to collect *bhiksha*. I want to serve the sadhus with the food that I get in alms.”

Jiva Khachar tried his best to dissuade Maharaj, but he went to the people with a cloth bag in his hands to collect *bhiksha*. Jiva Khachar, the landlord, also accompanied

him holding one end of the bag and started chanting, “Narayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho.” Within no time the bag was completely filled with laddus*, sukhdi, rotla, rotli,* etc. Maharaj gathered the sadhus at the village square and served them with *rotla*, *sukhdi* and curds, which they ate there standing up.

2. Purified Speech

Next morning Maharaj called on Rathod Dhadhal. He saw that Dhadhal’s wife Ranbai was feeling tired on account of having churned the curd. She was relaxing for a while. After taking rest, when she got up again to resume churning, Maharaj asked her, “Why had you suspended the churning?”

Ranbai replied, “Maharaj, I am all alone. If someone can join me, I will finish the work in no time.” Maharaj said, “Is that so?” He got up and started turning the churner. In a moment, butter started floating on the surface of the curd. Ranbai mixed some butter with sugar and offered it to Maharaj saying, “Maharaj, here is your share.” Maharaj gladly accepted the dish and ate it with great pleasure.

Maharaj was addressing the holy assembly of sadhus and devotees in the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar when a *digamber* (naked) yogi came. He had matted hair, carried a trident in his hand; he looked serene, yet appeared a bit tense. When Sura Khachar saw the nude sadhu, he burst out, “You ass. Being a *bawa* you are moving around nude!” The *bawa* didn’t utter a word but quietly touched Maharaj’s feet and walked away.

Maharaj then turned to Sura Khachar and said, “Why did you use such rude words?” Sura Khachar replied, “Maharaj it is our way. We begin both praise and scolding with the abuse *gadhedi* (donkey). A Kathi who has learnt to say *gadhedi* is said to have completed his education.”

Maharaj replied, “Do you know that Lord Shiva himself had come for our darshan in the form of a *bawa*? So, resolve from today that a *satsangi* shall not use the filthy or abusive language or call people by rude names. Devotees must use courteous and polite language. The mouth that speaks the name of God should not be corrupted by using vulgar language. Since you kept the ass in your mouth, you shall turn fifty-one *malas* as atonement.” Sura Khachar fell at the feet of Maharaj and apologized for using bad language. All the devotees resolved to use polite language in all circumstances.

Then Sura Khachar went on his horse to the outskirts of village in search of the *bawa*, he could not locate him anywhere. When he looked at the sky and he beheld the *bawa* disappearing in the sky.

3. Manki’s Mount

Maharaj needed a fast horse for use during his travels to the villages. He had heard about the foal of Manki in Minapar. At that time Maharaj was in Loya. Bhim Pandya and his brother, Jiva, from the village of Chuda came to Loya. They had heard that swaminarayan was God and thought that if he is God then he should have the sixteen holy signs on his feet.

When they arrived in Loya, Maharaj was seated in the assembly, discoursing. Maharaj knew of Bhim Pandya’s wish and so stretched out his legs, giving Bhim

Pandya the chance to look at the signs on his feet. Bhim Pandya quickly observed Maharaj's feet and saw the sixteen holy signs of God. As a result he was convinced that Maharaj was God. Both brothers accepted *vartman* from Maharaj and then left to return to Chuda. On the way they came to Minapar village and recalled that they had lent some money to a Garasiyo from there. The amount due to them, including interest, was Rs. 3,000. When the brothers arrived at the Garasiyo's home, he realized that they would ask for the money he owed. So he requested, "Please give me some more time. I'll return the money to you all together."

But Bhim and Jivaram Pandya were firm and sasid, "Bapu! Many years have passed in this way with your postponements. This time I won't go without the money."

Just then, Bhim Pandya saw the young foal tied nearby and he had a thought, "This foal is of good breed. If Bapu gives it then I'll present it to Maharaj." So, he asked, "Bapu! It does not matter if you do not have the money, but give that foal tied over there. I'll sign that I've received the full amount."

Hearing this, Bapu felt as if he had been struck by lightning. He thought for a few moments, "If I don't give the foal these Brahmins will be shocked and if they die I will incur the sin of killing two Brahmins." So, Bapu said, "Pandya! This foal is very valuable. It's divine. But you too are divine. So, if it clears the debt and pleases you then you may have the foal."

Then, Bapu performed *pujan* of the foal by applying a *kumkum chandlo* to her forehead. He then applied a *chandlo* to the forehead of Bhim and Jivaram and handed over the foal with tears in his eyes. Bhim cancelled Bapu's debt and then both brothers left to go to Loya.

At that moment Maharaj was seated in an assembly in Loya. He told Sura Khachar, "Sura Khachar! Keep some *kumkum* and a garland ready. Our *garuda* is coming and I want to perform its *pujan*."

Just then, Bhim and Jivaram entered the *darbar* with the foal. Maharaj saw them and said, "Sura Khachar! This Bhim Pandya has brought our *garuda*."

Seeing the foal, Sura Khachar and the other Darbars suddenly stood up. Sura Khachar observed the foal from head to toe, stroked its head, looked at the head decoration, and inspected the feet and horseshoes. He commented, "Maharaj! This foal is of the Manki breed, but even in that it is of the highest pedigree. I have never seen such a horse before. I had heard that the Garasiyo of Minapar had such fine foal, but no matter how much money you offered he refused to sell."

Bhim Pandya then revealed, "Bapu! This is foal of that Garasiyo."

Maharaj said, "Pandya! This is our Garuda. It has taken birth just to serve me. Today you have done a great service." Then Maharaj imprinted both his sacred feet on the chest of Bhim Pandya and his brother, Jivaram. After receiving Maharaj's blessings, both brothers returned home.

4. Predicts Famine

After touring the Kanam region of Gujarat, Maharaj stayed for some time at Vartal. Then he toured Charotar visiting Daduser, Antroli, Vadnagar, Vishalnagar, Unjha,

Dangerva and Naderia before arriving in Motera. The devotees from Ahmedabad called on Maharaj at Motera and prayed, "Maharaj, please come to Shripur (Ahmedabad) and do grace our houses and make us happy in the manner you have been doing others." Maharaj replied, "You have shown patience for all these years, so please have some more. The Suba of Ahmedabad is quarrelsome. He will create problems. Therefore, be patient. In a few years there will be good rule." With these consoling words he left for Vartal.

During this year, wherever Maharaj went, he warned the devotees against the approaching famine. He told the people, "Do not waste grains. Even if you don't have money, borrow, but stock grains to last for at least two years. The days ahead are full of difficulties. Be patient during the drought and remember the Lord. No harm shall come to a devotee."

After a short stay at Vartal, Maharaj visited Limbasi, Bhensjaal, Loya and Nagadka. He celebrated the Vasant festival in the *darbar* of Sura Khachar at Nagadka. Then to warn the devotees against the approaching drought, he went for the darshan of Nagadka Mahadev and prayed for the protection of the devotees. There he asked for *malas* made of *rudraksha* beads. Then he wore a bead of *rudraksha* round his own neck and made every sadhu, *brahmachari* and devotee, wear one bead each round their necks. Then Maharaj said: "Mahadevji is known as Rudra. He will be merciful during the drought. I have asked you all to wear these *rudraksha* beads to protect yourself against the approaching famine. In order to please Rudra-Mahadevji, I have asked you to wear this *rudraksha*. So devotees will not suffer much during the famine."

5. The Art of Liberation

After completing his Sanskrit studies, Nityanand Swami came to Maharaj at Nagadka. Maharaj instructed him conduct a discourse on the Shrimad Bhagvat.

Maharaj often emphasized that only the knowledge which helps one earn salvation is real knowledge. He asked the sadhus to study Sanskrit but he gave greater importance to saintliness and purity of action than to learning.

Once, Maharaj asked Gunatitanand Swami to go to Buranpur for *satsang*. Someone remarked, "Maharaj! Buranpur is an unknown region. Only learned sadhus will be useful there. This sadhu has no education. If he has to face questions during the discourses, he will be confused."

Maharaj replied, "He may not be a learned sadhu, but his actions are pure. He cannot be tempted by wealth and women. His life will speak volumes."

There was a sadhu called Nrusinhanand Swami. Early in the morning he would wake up to read in the light of the lamp near Maharaj. While reading pages remained unturned in his hands, his focus would become steady in Maharaj. Therefore, at times, Maharaj used to tell him off for lack of concentration in studies. Similarly, one day early in the morning Nrusinhanand's consciousness steadied on the *murti* of Maharaj, and the flames from the stove burnt the page of the Bhagvat.

Maharaj, while testing him, scolded, "Have you lost interest?" Nrusinhanand Swami burst into tears and replied, "Maharaj, I am not deviating, but when I look at your

murti my consciousness becomes one with you." Maharaj was pleased with his reply. Maharaj said, "You may stop your studies. You have now studied everything. Whatever there is to attain by learning, you have attained."

Maharaj insisted that whatever knowledge one has, it should be useful in attaining *moksha*. Maharaj asked Dinanath Bhatt, "How many verses of the shastras have you committed to memory?" Dinanath Bhatt replied, "Maharaj, I have studied many scriptures and I know the entire Bhagvat by heart. Everyday I recite from the eighteen thousand verses of the Bhagvat."

Maharaj remarked, "Oh! You know that much!" and then asked him, "But have you chosen any verse for your salvation?"

"No, Maharaj, I have never given thought to that," said Bhattji.

Maharaj again asked him, "Come on Bhattji, tell me which verse guides one to *moksha*." Dinanath Bhatt went into deep thought, got perturbed and beads of sweat appeared on his forehead. He removed his cap and started scratching his head. Maharaj realized his confusion and quoted the canto and the chapter of the Bhagvat he was referring to. Even then Bhattji could not identify the *shloka*. So Maharaj recited the *shloka*:

"Prasangamajaram pāshamātmanaha kavayo viduhu;
Sa eva Sādhushu kruto mokshadwāramapāvrutam."

"If one has the same intensity of attachment towards God's Ekantik Sadhu as one feels to one's dear ones, then the doorway of *moksha* is opened."

Bhattji finally realized the essence. Thus, Maharaj laid stress not only on erudition, but also on saintliness and pure action as the key to *moksha*.

6. Discouraged Abusive Songs

Swarupanand Swami and other sadhus returned to Maharaj at the end of their religious tour of the rural areas. Maharaj asked them, "How many persons could you influence to join Satsang? What type of people did you come across?"

Swarupanand Swami replied, "Maharaj, we visited many places. But the real man is only this one (Maharaj) who is here under the neem tree."

To pray for peace during the famine to come and for the protection of the devotees, Maharaj instructed Nityanand Swami to conduct discourses on the Bhagvat. At the end of the discourses, Maharaj made all the sadhus wear *rudraksha*.

From here he went to Sarangpur, and decided to celebrate the Fuldol festival there on a grand scale. He invited many sadhus and devotees to participate in the festival from all the villages. On the auspicious day of Holi, at night, the ceremonial fire *(holi*) was lit on the outskirts of the village. Maharaj arrived there and performed the *pujan* by offering milk and coconut. Then he performed five circumambulations of the ceremonial fire.

Then Maharaj mounted his mare, Manki, and commanded to the entire gathering, "Holika is a righteous woman. Therefore, all of you should pledge from today that you will not use filthy or abusive language nor follow only vulgar customs during this great festival. You should not beat your breast nor sing obscene songs. This is not

appropriate behaviour of devotees of God. We must give up such uncivilized customs from today. The devotees shall sing the Holi bhajans written and composed by great sadhus like Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Premanand Swami and others."

After giving this instruction, on his return, he commanded Muktanand Swami, Premanand Swami and other sadhus to compose verses suitable for the Hindola (Swing) Festival, Fuldol (Festival of Flowers) and Holi (Festival of Colours). Thus, the sadhus composed verses which brought awareness about the inner enemies of ego, lust, greed and others. Thus Maharaj eradicated many evils from the society and introduced good and healthy customs. As a result, religion, ethics and devotion were beautifully interwoven with the social life of the people.

On the day of Dhuleti (day following Holi) Maharaj played sprayed colours on the devotees. Maharaj sprinkled *gulal* on the devotees and every one was drenched in colour. Maharaj went for bath at Narayan Lake, on the outskirts of the town. While returning to the town after his bath, Maharaj met Gunatitanand Swami and Nishkulanand Swami who were coming from Gadhada. They fell at the feet of Maharaj. Then Maharaj enquired, "Tell me sadhus, what gifts have you brought for me?" He accepted the flowers and garlands offered by the two sadhus.

7. The Glory of Gunatit

Bhagwan Swaminarayan identifies Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation of Akshardham during the Fuldol celebration at Rathod Dhadhal's house in Sarangpur

At Rathod Dhadhal's house in Sarangpur Maharaj played *ras* with the sadhus. Maharaj recited verses from one of Kabir's poems:

"Jogiyā talat janam kerā fāslā
Premna pyālā jogiyā, jug jug jivo so jogiyā."

He would sing like that and touch Gunatitanand Swami's chest with his stick. Then he recited another verse:

"Koti Krishna jode hāth, Koti Vishnu name māth,

Koti Shankar dhare dhyān, Koti Brahma kare jnān;
Sadguru khele Vasant."

"Millions of Krishnas pray with folded hands, millions of Vishnus bow their heads; Millions of Shankars meditate on him, and millions of Brahmas narrate the stories of his glory. Such a Sadguru is celebrating the Spring."

He once again touched Gunatitanand Swami's chest with his stick. Thus, he touched it thrice while singing. Then Maharaj stopped and asked, "Who could be that *sadguru* described in the verses?"

Anand Swami and Muktanand Swami replied, "Maharaj, you are that *sadguru*."

Maharaj replied, "The verses sing the glory of the *sadguru*. I am Purushottam Narayan. The *sadguru* whose praise you find in the verses is this Gunatitanand Swami – the manifestation of Aksharbrahman. Kabirji used to worship this Aksharbrahman as 'Sadguru Saheb'. That Aksharbrahman is this Gunatitanand Swami who eternally remains in my service in a manifest form." In such words Maharaj spoke about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami. As Gunatitatand Swami was younger in age and had recently become a sadhu, many people failed to understand the significance of Maharaj's words.

Thus, Maharaj danced till late in the night with the sadhus and made them immensely happy.

The women-devotees of north Gujarat asked for *fagwa*, "O Maharaj! May we be not affected by your *maya*, may we be not affected by passion and anger, may we always witness you as the form of purity, and may we never develop dislike or see faults in you..."

Maharaj happily granted them such divine *fagwa* (blessings).

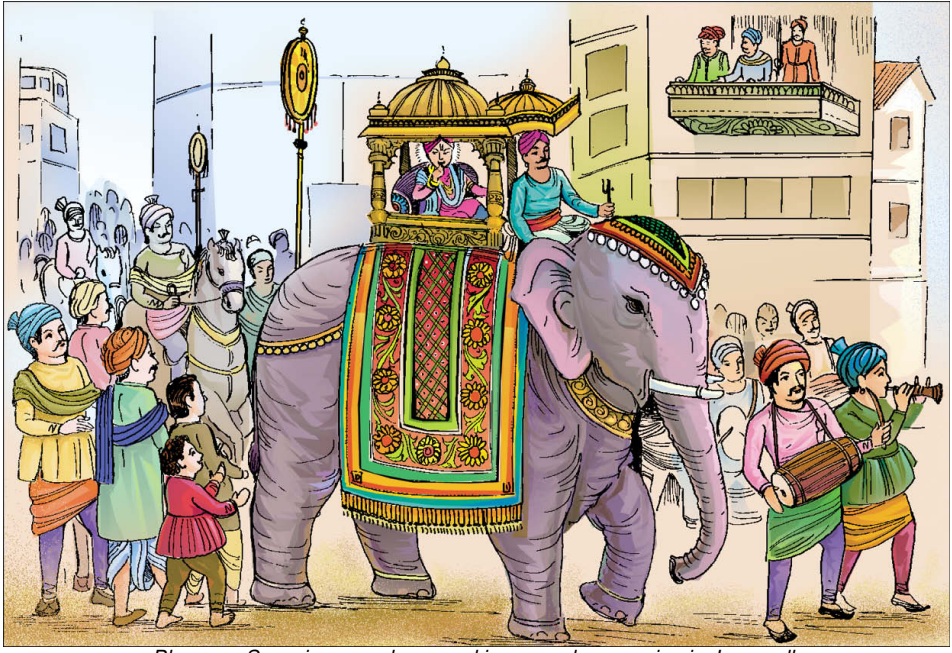
The next day, the sadhus performed Maharaj's *pujan*. Then Maharaj lay down on a bed. So, Mahabhavanand Swami prepared to massage Maharaj's feet, but Maharaj withdrew his feet under the bed sheet. Mahabhavanand Swami said, "Maharaj! For these feet, we left our homes and families, bore hardships, stayed in the forests, suffered cold, heat, abuse and insults, and performed austerities. We did all that for these two sacreed feet of yours."

Hearing this, Maharaj said, "Once, a begger swept and cleaned a rich man's courtyard. The vaue of his work was one paisa, but the beggar asked for half a *maund* (approx 10 kg) of gold. That is what you have done. For these feet great seers and sages do austerities for thousands of years, shrinking down to their bones and skins. Even then they haven't attained them. So how are you to get them?"

Mahabhavanand Swami courteously and humbly said, "Maharaj! You are the supreme incarnation. We are not sages or seers and our austerities are nothing compared to theirs. And if Indra and Brahma were to come to tempt us away from your lotus feet, we would not budge."

On hearing this Maharaj was pleased and extended his feet. He also gave Mahabhavanand Swami footprints on the chest.

8. Nawab's Faith Vindicated



Bhagwan Swaminarayan honoured in a grand procession in Junagadh

In Junagadh, there lived many Nagar Brahmins who were devotees of Lord Shiva, but opposed Swaminarayan. They came to know that the *satsangis* were preparing for a grand reception for Maharaj in Junagadh. Through the Diwan, who was a Nagar, the Nawab was informed, "Swaminarayan is God. He is to come to the town with many people. He will fight with you and shall conquer your kingdom. Therefore, do not allow him to enter the town."

The Nawab, however, was a religious-minded man. He replied, "My kingdom belongs to God. If Swaminarayan is God, let him conquer my state. I will definitely receive him in my town." With these words he sent a messenger and gave his consent to Maharaj's visit to the town.

The devotees took out a grand procession with pomp and ceremony and honoured Maharaj by seating him on an elephant. When the procession reached the court of the Nawab, a watchman's son ran towards Maharaj with a cucumber. He raised it towards Maharaj, who bent low from the elephant and received it. Maharaj was overwhelmed by love of the boy. He started munching the cucumber even while the procession was in progress. The entire town had turned out in the streets to have the darshan of Maharaj.

The Nagar minister of the Nawab saw this as an opportunity to prejudice the Nawab against Maharaj. He said to the Nawab, "Look, he calls himself God, but has no manners. As if he has not seen the cucumber in his life before, he is eating it during the procession." The Nawab was a *mumukshu* and wise. He instantly replied, "I am sure, this Swaminarayan is either God himself or his beloved angel. Otherwise none can venture to munch a cucumber when thousands of people have come out to see him." The Diwan looked crestfallen. The Nawab saw God in Maharaj and was convinced of

his divinity.

CHAPTER 12

1. The Famine of 1869

Maharaj went from there to Jhinabhai's *darbar* in Panchala. Maharaj informed jhinabhai, "There will be famine so store food grains," and asked Jhinabhai to stock hundred *kalshi* (1,600 *maunds*) of *juvar*.

It was the year 1869; Lord Maharudra appeared to Maharaj in the form of a Brahmin and said, "Sins have greatly affected this world, your devotees have been troubled and tortured greatly by the Vaam Margis, Shakti Panthis and Kuda Panthis, who have grown menacingly powerful. Therefore, I shall send a drought. Your devotees shall not be affected. You should remain underground during the famine." With these words, Maharudra disappeared.

There was no rain throughout all the four months of the monsoon season. In the *darbar* of Dada Khachar three special rooms were labelled as 'Gujarat', 'Kathiawad' and 'Kutch' where Maharaj lived incognito. Whenever sadhus came from their *vicharan* in Kutch, Gujarat or other region to Gadhada to enquire about Maharaj, Dada Khachar used to reply, "Maharaj is in Kutch now" or, "These days Maharaj is in Gujarat." Thus he would remain non-commital.

The famine was devastating. Towns and villages became deserted. So many houses were empty. Innumerable men and cattle perished. Maharaj sent many Kathi devotees to the homes of the devotees in Gujarat. One day, Maharaj secretly left Gadhada along with Mukund Varni to go to Methan. There he lived incognito with Dev Shankar, Kakuji and Punjabhai in turn.

Laduba, Jivuba and others became unhappy on account of Maharaj's departure. They sent Naja Jogiya in search of Maharaj. On the outskirts of the village of Methan, he asked a servant girl about Maharaj. She directed him to Punjabhai's house. Naja Jogiya talked about the sorrows of Jivuba and Laduba. Maharaj took leave of Punjabhai and his wife, Jijiba, and said, "Tomorrow we shall leave for Gadhpur."

That very night Goddess Lakshmiji gave *darshan* to Jijiba and said, "Now you should not worry, I will serve him. I shall bring forth a period of prosperity for the devotees." Jijiba reported this to Maharaj. Maharaj blessed her and returned to Gadhada.

2. End of Famine

At the time of the famine of 1869, Maharaj had given the sadhus the vow of eating tasteless food – food without any of the six tastes *(khatras*) and made them wear *rudraksha* beads round their necks. Almost a year had passed eating this type of tasteless food. Therefore, Maharaj decided to invite all the sadhus and their groups and devotees from various regions to participate in the Holi festival. Maharaj sent letters to

this effect to every town and village and himself went upto Kundal to receive them.

At Kundal Maharaj stayed in the *darbar* of Mamaiya Patgar where the groups of sadhus arrived. The sadhus looked very weak and their bodies were so reduced that their ribs could be counted. Some of the sadhus had become victims of night blindness on account of malnutrition. Tears rolled from the eyes of the devotees when they saw the weak bodies of the sadhus. They requested Maharaj to withdraw such difficult vows.

Mamaiya Patgar's mother, Raiba, asked Maharaj, "Why do you dress like a sannyasi? Remove this matted hair and get your head clean-shaven. Remove this *rudraksha* bead and wear a *tulsi kanthi*. Please start accepting everything and free the sadhus from the vow of eating tasteless food. Please fill the bowls of the sadhus to the brim. Please bestow bliss upon us. If you and your sadhus will accept everything, things will improve soon and people will be happy. There will be good rain and the earth will be green again. Failing this, the earth will be sapless and dead."

Maharaj was pleased with the innocent and devout entreaties of Raiba. He got his head clean-shaven, freed the sadhus from the vow of eating tasteless food, removed the *rudraksha* bead and offered them once again the *tulsi kanthi* and asked them to don a Vaishnav attire. He banished the drought and brought greenery back. The times improved. The devotees were happy. Kundal was submerged in bliss and then Maharaj came to Gadhada via Kalvani.

He celebrated the Holi festival at Gadhada and gave the happiess of his divine company for a fairly long time and once again started his religious tour after celebrating Janmashtmi.

CHAPTER 13

1. Invited Illness at Jaliya

Touring Sorath via Panchala and Manavadar, Maharaj came to Varjang in the month of Aso. Maharaj said to Hira Thakkar, "I feel unwell. Show me some solitary place where I can take rest for some time." Hira Thakkar vacated his own house and handed it over to Maharaj, who, by his divine will, fell ill and had a high fever.

Within no time the news of Maharaj's illness spread everywhere and sadhus started coming to inquire about his health. Maharaj refused to eat or drink anything. He did not take any food for thirteen days. As a result he found it very difficult to move or sit. The sadhus and devotees prayed to Maharaj to give up the illness, and so he accepted a little food.

Then late one night Maharaj said, "Bring me some *penda*, *barfi* and *jalebi* which I would like to eat in order to get rid of my illness." Instantly Hira Thakkar and Jago Babario went on a fast horse to Bhayavadar and got fresh and hot *jalebi* prepared and brought them to Maharaj. Maharaj took two to three pieces of *jalebi* and fell asleep.

After the meal Maharaj said, "Give me a cold water bath. Pour lots of water on me so that its stream reaches the river Venu, thus will I completely recover."

All the women went to the river and started bringing pots of water on their heads. Naja Bhakta and Bhaguji started bathing Maharaj. Bhaguji thought if Maharaj continues to take a cold water bath for much longer, he will fall more ill. So, a plate was placed under the low stool on which Maharaj was seated and the water that ran down Maharaj's body was collected in it. A devotee then took the plate to pour the water into the river Venu. Then Maharaj intuitively inquired, "Has the stream reached the river Venu?" "Yes Maharaj," replied the devotees.

Maharaj remarked, "Stop now. I am cured now. Bring some raw tamarind fruit and *chibhda*. I shall eat them." Maharaj put on fresh clothes and ate some tamarind fruit and *chibhda.*

From Jaliya Maharaj went to Gadhada and celebrated Annakut there.

2. Dumb as Doves

One of the divine purposes behind Maharaj's descent on earth was to enlighten people about his supreme form and eventually to grant them *moksha*. Maharaj used to talk a great deal about his supremacy.

For nearly eight months, he kept the *paramhansas* with him at Loya, Nagadka and Panchala and talked to them about his supremacy. Akshardham is above all the *dhams*. It is free from *maya*. There is no distinction between male and female. Our Aksharbrahman is beyond the realms of Agni, Varun, Vayu, Indra, Surya, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Vasudev, Ramachanndra, Nar-Narayan, Shri

Krishna, Vairaj Purush and others. I am beyond Aksharbrahman. In order to bestow divine bliss I have taken the form of a human being. I have come here to destroy *avidya* and help people attain the *ekantik* state and *moksha*."

Maharaj said so many things like this and performed many divine exploits convincing people about his supreme form. The *paramhansas* heard so many such incidents for eight months. Then one day, Maharaj asked the different groups of *paramhansas* to visit the villages and inform people, "Swaminarayan is God."

"We will do accordingly, Maharaj," said the innocent sadhus and then went to the villages and started preaching. After some months when all the groups of sadhus had returned to Gadhada, Maharaj exchanged some pleasantries with them and then asked, "What did you say to the villagers? How did you describe me?" Then some of the *paramhansas* replied, "We described you as Datta, Kapil and Vyas." Some of them said, "Maharaj, we compared you with incarnations like Rama, Krishna and others."

Maharaj smiled sarcastically at them and said, "You have done extremely well." Then he explained, "You are as dumb as doves. If you eat *dudhpak*, *maalpuva*, *puri*, vegetables, *dal*, *curry*, rice and radish and when you belch you will feel that the taste of all the dishes that you have eaten has been suppressed by that of the radish. In the same way, although I have talked a great deal about my supremacy why could you not grasp it? You are as dumb as doves. If you have realized my supremacy, how could you fail to narrate it?" Thus he pulled them up.

The *paramhansas* who had compared Maharaj with the incarnations, realized their mistake and those who had described him as the supreme Godhead and divine cause behind all the incarnations became very happy. Here, Maharaj had hinted to ignore the obstinate attitude of the masses as well as the scriptures. This incident opened the eyes of many of the *paramhansas*.

CHAPTER 14

1. Succour to the Poor

In the Dandhavya region of Gujarat, Maharaj visited Adalaj and Vadu before reaching Karjisan. He stayed here for a month. This year also there was scanty rainfall in Kathiawad so Maharaj invited the sadhus and devotees to Karjisan to celebrate Janmashtmi. Upto midnight the sadhus and devotees played the drums and sang bhajans. At the time of Lord Krishna's birth, the devotees washed the lotus feet of Maharaj with *panchamrut* and offered him new clothes. Then a swing was fastened to the branch of a banyan tree and Maharaj was rocked with love.

He told the sadhus and devotees to stay till the New Moon, pleased them and saw them off. Then he moved for some period in Karjisan, Meou and Langhnaj.

There lived two *satsangi* women in Langhnaj, one was very poor. Her name was Sonbai Bhavsar. The other was a rich Nagar Brahmin. Her name was Gangaba. Sonbai invited Maharaj and other sadhus for a meal. When Gangaba learnt about this, she approached Sonbai and said, "You have not got rice and pulses of good quality. Your foodstuff is inferior to mine, so you cook and serve the sadhus and I shall prepare a special dish for Maharaj with my superior grains and shall bring it to your house and serve it to Maharaj." Poor Sonbai was hurt but with great pain she agreed to the proposal.

She thought, "My foodstuff is inferior, it could not be served to Maharaj."

At noon, Maharaj came to Sonbai's house for lunch wearing his wooden sandals. He looked at Sonbai. She looked sad and her eyes had become misty. Maharaj asked her to explain the cause of her sorrow. Tearfully, Sonbai explained everything to Maharaj. Maharaj declared, "Bring whatever you have cooked. I shall eat only your food."

Sonbai became very happy and laid a low stool for Maharaj and offered him the food. When Maharaj had finished his meals, Gangaba, appeared, followed by a Brahmin with a prepared dish. Maharaj told her, "I have eaten, I enjoyed Sonbai's food. Now share your food with Sonbai?" Gangaba introspected, realized her mistake and was convinced about Sonbai's sincerity and devotion.

2. Throne of God

It was dusk. In the *darbar* of Dada Khachar, Maharaj had taken a seat on a cot in Motiba's room near the gate, facing east. He was addressing an assembly when a Brahmin astrologer came there. This man was a great scholar of astrology, *Samudrik Shastra*, mathematics and astronomy. Maharaj saw him from a distance and called him to sit near his cot.

He minutely studied the eyes, nose and forehead of Maharaj and said, "You are a Hindustani Brahmin (Brahmin from North India), Hariprasad Pande's son. You are a

Brahmin boy and yet claiming to be God?"

Maharaj replied, "Brahmin! Since I left my home, I have visited many kingdoms, but no throne was vacant for me. I went North, South and East before coming to Kathiawad in the West. Here we could see that the throne of God was lying vacant. So we have occupied it." With these words, Maharaj smiled and extended his lotus feet towards him. The Brahmin saw all the sixteen signs of God on the Maharaj's sacred feet. He was convinced, as he knew that only God possesses all the sixteen auspicious signs. He was awed at this rare sight.

Maharaj glanced at him. He saw a flood of light coming out of the lotus feet. It was such a powerful light that countless *brahmands* would immerse into it. He was soon in a trance where he saw Akshardham. He saw Maharaj seated on the heavenly throne. He saw all the incarnations and *muktas* in service of Maharaj. He also saw countless forms of Lord Shiva in the service of Maharaj. The Brahmin was a devotee of Lord Shiva, who said to him, "Shriji Maharaj is the foremost among all the incarnations. He is the cause of all the incarnations. He is Purushottam Narayan, the cause of all causes. So, seek shelter unto him and worship him. You will go to Akshardham."

After some time, the Brahmin woke up from his trance and fell at the feet of Maharaj. He prayed, "Maharaj, please forgive me. I was unaware of your greatness. Now that I have realized it, please make me your devotee and bless me."

Maharaj pardoned the Brahmin and blessed him. He initiated him and made him a *satsangi*.

3. Reception at Dharampur

Maharaj was in Gadhada. He omnisciently revealed the earnest desire of Kushalkunverba to welcome him to Dharampur. He sent a letter to her stating, "In a few days we shall come to Dharampur via Vartal."

Then he left Gadhada for Vartal. On his way, he visited Sinjiwada, Budhej and Mahelav. He participated in the festival in Vartal and then set out for Dharampur. Queen Kushalkunvarba's joy knew no bounds. She went to the outskirts with Prince Vijaydev to receive Maharaj. Maharaj was offered rich clothes and precious ornaments of gold and diamonds. He was honoured in a procession on an elephant with much fanfare and pomp. Maharaj was accorded a warm welcome in the royal court of Dharampur. The Queen declared, "O Maharaj, I dedicate my whole kingdom at your feet."

Maharaj replied, "I don't seek kingdoms. Let the donkey bear its burden. I have not come here to run a state. I manage the affairs of infinite number of *brahmands*. We have come here from Akshardham to liberate the *jivas.*"

4. Prefection Through Purification

Once, Kushalkunvarba removed the husk from a type of fragrant rice and sent a bundle of it to Maharaj. Maharaj opened the bundle and took a handful of the milk-white sweet-smelling intact rice.

No grain had been blunted while removing the husk. Then he showed the rice to the

gathering and asked, “What is this?” Everyone replied, “Maharaj, it is rice.” Maharaj repeated the same question thrice and all the three times he received the same answer, “It is rice.” Maharaj also endorsed their answer and said, “Of course, it is rice.”

Thereupon, Muktanand Swami asked Maharaj, “What is the significance of your question which you have asked while showing the rice?” Maharaj replied, “I want to purify you and make you milk-white, pure. The way each and every grain of this rice is flawless and intact, I want you to become flawless and intact.”

All the devotees understood the meaning of Maharaj’s gesture.

Maharaj was also honoured in Vansda, where he stayed for three days. There, he showed his pleasure by giving forty imprints of his holy feet.

Kushalkunvarba served Maharaj for many days, arranging for a variety of delicacies. She focused on each part of his divine form and embedded his *murti* in her heart. Maharaj blessed her and then left to return to Gadhada.

5. Darshan in Twelve Forms

From Gadhada Maharaj went to Vartal to participate in the Fuldol festival. Maharaj had writen a letter to the devotees of all regions and the groups of touring sadhus inviting them to come to Vartal. Maharaj was to shower everyone with colours. Everyone came to Vartal to take part and have darshan of Maharaj.

The devotees of Gujarat had constructed two big tanks filled with coloured water at Jnanbaug. *Gulal* powder was stacked up to ten feet high and thousands of colour sprinklers were stacked. Maharaj was pleased with the preparations. Dressed in white clothes, Maharaj accompanied the sadhus and devotees to Jnanbaug. Maharaj first of all loaded coloured water in the sprays and began sprayed it on all. The devotees also sprayed Maharaj many times. The spraying colours continued for a long time. Then Maharaj bathed in Dharu Lake and went for dinner and rest.

At Jnanbaug two mango trees were located near each other and were considered as *muktas*. Two of branches were facing each other. So, taking their support a rafter was tied on which Nishkulanand Swami suspended a *hindolo*. This twelve-door *hindolo* was very beautiful and had been artistically made by Nishkulanand Swami. It was encrusted with small bells, pearls and jewels to enhance its beauty.

In the evening Maharaj was requested to sit in the *hindolo*. Mahraj had donned rich gold embroidered robes and was wearing the diamond-encrusted crown gifted by Kushalkunvarba of Dharampu, and also ornaments of gold. Muktanand Swami started to swing the *hindolo* with the help of a silk cord.

Then a unique thing happened. Maharaj assumed twelve forms and appeared on each of the twelve doors. From all sides the devotees offered garlands, which Maharaj accepted by extending a stick. The *paramhansas* made bhajans of this divine deed and sang them. Then all the forms merged into the original form of Maharaj. Maharaj descended from the hindolo and all the sadhus and devotees performed *pujan* of Maharaj. They gave gifts and performed *arti*. Everyone was blessed with the sight of these divine deeds.

CHAPTER 15

1. Code of Conduct for the Sadhus

Then Maharaj arrived in Gadhada. From here, on Jeth *sud* 10 he sent a letter to the *paramhansas*. He wrote, "Observe strictly the *vartmans* of *nirman*, *nishkam*, *nirlobh*, *nisswad* and *nissneh*. Avoid eight-fold contact of women. Dwell in the forest on the village outskirts. Never stay at a strange place from where you can see or hear a woman. During daytime, you can stay with a householder or in the village square. Always shun money. Never touch rich clothes, pearls, precious stones, diamonds and corals. Never discuss the affairs of the town. Never talk about the property or estate of the householders. Never talk about one's own birthplace, native place, community or relatives. Never make any reference to an evil person. Discourage those who try to discuss the town politics or something bad. Observe Ekadashi and other auspicious days and celebrate festivals. Denounce those sadhus who keep wealth with them. The younger *paramhansas* should respect the older ones and always show courtsey towards them. The younger *paramhanas* should always offer seats to the older ones and allow them to sit in the front rows. Before taking their food they should serve the senior *paramhansas* and offer them water before drinking it. They should be awakened with the call 'Swaminarayan'. They should observe all rules and never defy them." Maharaj sent a letter containing these precepts to the *paramhansas* and taught them to lead a life of purity and austerity.

2. Give Up Bad Nature

Maharaj was in Nagadka along with the sadhus and devotees. He and the devotees used to travel on horseback. There was a pony there which had a habit of kicking people if they tried to approach it. Maharaj came to know about the pony. Maharaj insisted that whosoever came into his contact, be it man or beast, must give up bad habits and be pure. Maharaj never allowed people to retain their unbecoming behaviour.

Maharaj, therefore, resolved to remove pony's bad behaviour. Early next morning Maharaj went to the stable, and took a seat on a small stool behind the pony. Then he touched the hind legs of the pony with a stick, immediately it kicked with both its back legs. After two minutes, once again, Maharaj touched the pony with the stick. Again the pony kicked back. Thus, every two minutes Maharaj would touch the pony with the stick and the pony responded by kicking. Gradually, the pony started putting up with the stick, but did not completely give up its bad habit of kicking.

It was noon and time for lunch. Sura Khachar and Mulji Brahmachari came to request Maharaj to take his meals. Maharaj said to Sura Khachar, "I will go for meals if you agree to continue to touch this pony with this stick. Now if we touch it with the

stick thrice, it kicks only once. Half the habit is gone, but it has not properly improved. Today I want this pony to overcome its bad temper." Sura Khachar agreed to take on Maharaj's duty.

Maharaj then went for lunch. Then after lunch, he gave a discourse. On his return to the stable, Maharaj took the stick from Sura Khachar and resumed touching the pony with the stick. By evening, the pony was really tired, and had given up the bad habit of kicking. Afterwards even if a child touched it, it would not kick it. Then Maharaj hinted to the devotees, "If you have such bad habits you must overcome them. Otherwise, God will force you to give them up." Everyone took the message in the right spirit.

CHAPTER 16

1. Stopped the Singing of Vulgar Songs

Maharaj heard peope singing obscene wedding songs in Gadhada, so he left Gadhada in the company of a *sevak* and arrived at Sukhpur. Here, too, the women were singing vulgar songs, full of abuses. Maharaj became unhappy and left the place immediately.

The devotees realized the real cause of Maharaj's grief. The loving devotees of Maharaj realized the significance of Maharaj's insistence upon purity of action. They followed Maharaj, fell at his feet apologizing and promised to stop singing vulgar songs. They sent a message to this effect to the women who then discontinued singing such songs. This was a fresh reform introduced by Maharaj among the *satsangis*.

From this village on the full moon day of Maha, Samvat1873 Maharaj sent a letter to all his devotees living in different villages asking them to discontinue the practice of singing obscene wedding songs. Instead, he suggested to them to sing bhajans celebrating the wedding of Rukmini and Radha. He went a step further and asked Muktanand Swami and Premanand Swami to compose bhajans to commemorate the wedding of Radha and Rukmini. This was done with a view to create and maintain a spiritual atmosphere during weddings.

2. Pleased a Child

Once, Maharaj was about to begin his religious discourses in the holy assembly at Gadhada. He was seated on a *sinhasan*. A seven-year-old boy was approaching Maharaj to offer his respects. At that very moment a deadly cobra came out from behind the congregation. Nobody except Maharaj was aware of the presence of the cobra. As soon as he saw the cobra, he ran towards it. While running towards the cobra, Maharaj knocked down the boy who was approaching him from the opposite side. When the devotees saw this, they looked back and saw that there was a big cobra. Bhaguji and Mulji went ahead of Maharaj and caught the cobra, put it into a pot and went off to set it free in far place.

Maharaj returned to his seat but he had not forgotten the boy. He called him, and put him on his lap and caressed him tenderly with love. He gave him two ripe mangoes as *prasad* and cheered him. The child was very happy to receive the divine love. He prostrated before Maharaj and returned to his seat.

CHAPTER 17

1. Defeat of Vedantacharya

Maharaj had resolved to celebrate the Annakut festival at Vartal. Along with sadhus and devotees, he arrived in Vartal. He celebrated Dhanteras, Kali Chaudash, Annakut, and Devuthi (Prabodhini) Ekadashi at Vartal and then returned to Gadhada.

After staying here for some time, once again he commenced *vicharan* and then returned to Vartal. This time, he was accompanied by Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and many other scholarly sadhus.

At that time a Vedantacharya had come to Gujarat. He was a South Indian Brahmin and was a great scholar, but he was vain and egoistic. He used to stay in Ahmedabad and Vadodara. Maharaj recognized his scholarship and invited him to Vartal. He was offered a comfortable stay in the ashram of Narayangiri and was served with rich food. Then a religious debate was held at Vartal which was chaired by Maharaj.

Maharaj asked the Vedantacharya to interpret the chief twelve precepts of Vedanta. The Vedantacharya tried many interpretations but none could stand before the arguments of Maharaj.

Then Maharaj offered his own interpretations of all the twelve precepts. The Vedantacharya was stunned to hear him. All his pride and ego vanished. But Maharaj offered him two hundred rupees and rich clothes in recognition of his scholarship and learning.

The Vedantacharya was very angry with Maharaj on account of his defeat in the debate. On reaching Nadiad he started criticizing Maharaj. Therefore, Maharaj sent Nityanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and Mahanubhavanand Swami with a message to the Vedantacharya, “Why do you criticize us? If you are interested in the debate once again you are most welcome.”

On hearing of Nityanand Swami’s arrival at Nadiad, the Vedantacharya left Nadiad that very night.

2. Re-Entry into Ahmedabad

The Peshwa rule ended in Ahmedabad and Visnagar in Samvat 1874. Now the city was under the control of the British.

The British established their rule in Ahmedabad and Mr Andrew Dunlop, an Englishman, was appointed as the Collector of Ahmedabad. Even before he took charge as the Collector, he had heard a good deal about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and also about his work from the devotees. He was aware of the good law and order situation in the regions of Maharaj’s influence. He was pleased with the law-abiding nature of the *satsangis*. Mr Dunlop knew that in those regions robbers, thieves and anti-social elements did not operate at all.

So when he took charge of the city administration, Mr Dunlop asked a *satsangi*, "Is there any Swaminarayan centre in this city? Why does Swaminarayan not visit Ahmedabad?" The *satsangi* narrated, in detail, the harassment from the Peshwas and how Maharaj had been forbidden to enter the city. Mr Dunlop replied, "You go to Swaminarayan and tell him that there is no more Peshwa rule in Ahmedabad. You are welcome to Ahmedabad and can happily resume your religious activities. Please extend him an invitation on my behalf to visit Ahmedabad."

Maharaj received the message and started for Ahmedabad with a group of sadhus and well-armed Kathis. Maharaj broke his journey at Jetalpur. Some jealous person approached Mr Dunlop and tried to poison his mind. He said, "Swaminarayan is going to invade Ahmedabad with well-armed Kathis. He wants to conquer Ahmedabad. If you have doubts you can go to Jetalpur and confirm this." But Mr Dunlop could not be so easily taken in by such loose talk. He was quite aware of Maharaj's greatness. On the contrary, he himself went with six bodyguards to Chandola Lake to receive Maharaj.

During his short halt at Jetalpur, Maharaj narrated an incident to Adharanand Swami and made him paint a picture depicting the story. Swami painted the expressions on the face of the hero, according to the description given by Maharaj. When the painting was ready, Maharaj said to Swami, "Carry this painting with you tomorrow."

The next day Maharaj, accompanied by the group of devotees, started towards Ahmedabad. Mr Dunlop was waiting for him near Chandola Lake. He was puzzled when he saw the clouds of the dust raised by the riders in the distance. He also saw sharp spears glittering on their shoulders. But when he saw the serene face of Maharaj and the innocent expressions on the faces of the devotees, all his doubts disappeared.

Maharaj approached Mr Dunlop. He got down from his horse. Mr Dunlop also saluted him and removed his cap as a mark of respect. Expressing his earlier fears, Mr Dunlop said to Maharaj, "For a moment or two, I felt (as it was reported by your opponents) that you were certainly going to invade Ahmedabad with armed men. But when I saw serenity and innocence written on your's and your devotees faces, all my doubts were resolved."

Maharaj replied, "We have come on this earth with a mission of liberating the people and to make them more and more religious by inspiring them to tell beads and worship God. Why should we fight? How can we have enmity with anybody? All these devotees are Kshatriya Darbars. They keep arms according to the traditions of their community. When the troublemakers see their weapons, they behave themselves and are discouraged from torturing our innocent sadhus. Nobody uses these weapons."

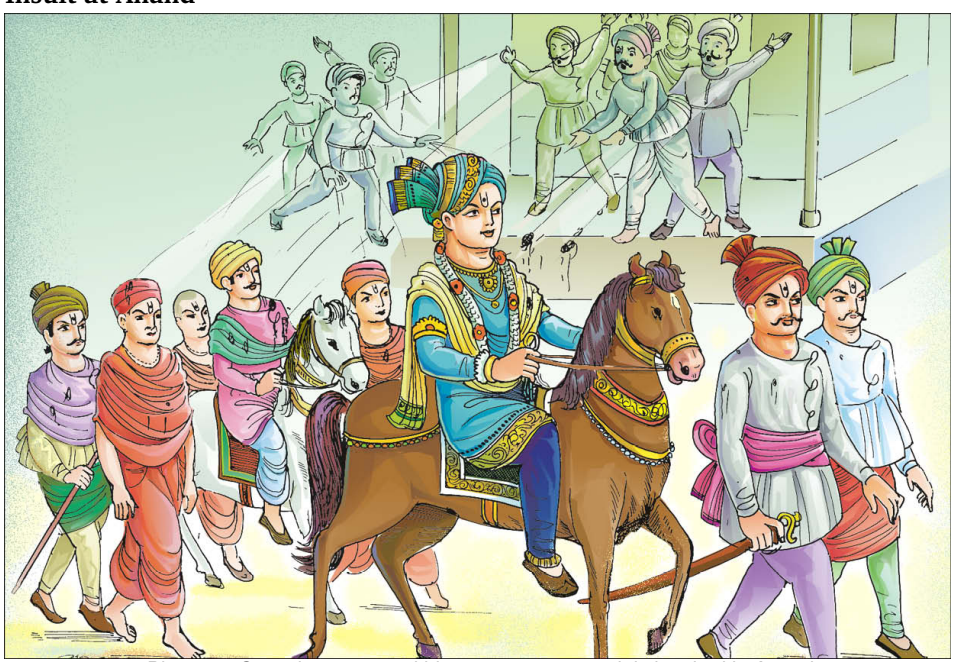
Maharaj and the group, accompanied by Mr Dunlop, reached Kankaria Lake. Tents were pitched there for Maharaj and Mr Dunlop. He kept on staring at Maharaj's face, and Maharaj in return kept on smiling at him. At last, Mr Dunlop could not resist the temptation of making a statement. He said, "Swaminarayan! I feel we have met before. I have had your darshan earlier." Maharaj instantly asked Adharanand Swami to bring the painting. Maharaj showed it to Mr Dunlop.

A fierce tiger was pouncing upon the *saheb*, and Maharaj, with a gesture of his

hand, was asking the tiger to return. When Mr Dunlop saw the painting, he soon recalled how during a hunting trip he had made a mistake and how Maharaj had saved him from the clutches of death at that time by appearing in a divine form. He fell at the feet of Maharaj. He recalled how he was frightened during youth. He raised his hat thrice and bowed before Maharaj.

He said, "Maharaj, now you can comfortably come to Ahmedabad to preach your teachings. I am at your service and you can ask for any help from us. We will try our best to help you. Please continue to protect us and show mercy towards us. Please bless us." Maharaj blessed him and resumed his work of propagating the Satsang philosophy in Ahmedabad without any obstruction. Now he profusely granted happiness to the devotees. He was making up for their loss all these years by bestowing upon them the choicest pleasures and favours.

3. Insult at Anand



Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his entourage are rudely insulted in Anand

From Gadhada, Maharaj came via Umreth and Bhalej to Vartal. Some devotees from Anand requested Maharaj, "Maharaj, please kindly pay a visit to Anand annd grace our homes." Maharaj replied, "There are opponents in Anand so we will consider your request and visit Anand in future." On hearing this, the devotees were disappointed. Their eyes became misty. They once again pleaded with Maharaj. This time Maharaj could not say no, he agreed to their request.

Maharaj started for Anand in the company of brave Kathis and sadhus. When the holy cavalcade entered Anand, the devotees received them and accorded a ceremonial reception. But when the opponents (*Mat Panthis*) learnt about Maharaj's visit to Anand, they became very angry. They feared that their own interests were in jeopardy. They

instigated certain bad elements to gather in the marketplace to offend and insult Maharaj.

Maharaj had instructed his followers in advance not to lose patience and to remain silent in the face of insults and abuses. When the group reached the marketplace the anti-social elements started hurling insults and abuses, but the devotees remained as calm. Then the arrogant people started showering pebbles, dust, rubbish and dung on the procession. Bhaguji, Dada Khachar, and Naja Jogiya were on the point of drawing their swords, but Maharaj stopped them and asked them to restrain themselves.

Maharaj and his followers halted under a huge banyan tree in the plot of Gusaiji on the outskirts of Anand. Maharaj had to return to Vartal via Bakrol without a meal. In the evening Maharaj said, “What a great victory that was.” Brahmanand Swami said, “You speak as if we have done a great feat like conquering the fort of Ider.”

The Darbars said, “What victory? We were rained on with dust and dung. We the brave were beaten with reeds and if people were to know about this no one will employ us.”

Maharaj replied, “We have endured. We have not opposed them. This has enhanced our reputation. Otherwise, there would have been a bloody skirmish and increased bitterness and enmity.”

The ugly incident stirred the conscience of the leading people and the businessmen of Anand. They thought, “It was really wrong of our townsmen to have caused such pain to innocent, unassuming sadhus.” With this realization, the leading people of Anand came to Vartal, apologized and promised that such ugly scenes would never be repeated. They opened the gates of Anand for Maharaj and his devotees for ever.

CHAPTER 18

1. Appointment of Sadgurus

In those days, Vadodara was famous as Chhoti Kashi, since many learned scholars of Sanskrit lived there. Amongst them was a South Indian Brahmin who was defeated at Vartal in a debate against Maharaj and the Swaminarayan Sampraday. He was an evil genius and was instigated by the pseudo-sadhus and self-proclaimed yogis. He used to say, "Shriji Maharaj is not God. I have met him at Vartal. He is a false deity. He is cheating innocent people. I am prepared to prove this with the help of the scriptures. I will expose his Sampraday." He went on bragging like this everywhere. This caused great pain to the devotees in Vadodara. They wrote a letter to Maharaj, "O Maharaj! The Vedantacharya is abusing you very much here. He calls you an impostor. Please send a scholarly sadhu who can defeat this man. The Maharaja Sayajirao of Vadodara is wise and just. He will give his judgement according to the shastras. Therefore, please do consider our request and send a scholarly sadhu to Vadodara." Maharaj smiled when he read this letter. Then he said, "Muktanand Swami you are a great scholar. You are saintly and not vain. You please go to Vadodara and defeat this Vedantacharya."

Muktanand Swami replied, "Maharaj, I am too small a man for such a difficult task. Besides, I don't know how to answer tricky scholarly questions." Maharaj replied, "Don't worry, and remember us when you answer the questions. Everything will be clear to you. You will be able to answer intuitively. Your saintliness will speak for you."

Thus, Muktanand Swami went to Vadodara. When he was on his way to participate in the debate in the state palace, some of the evil *bawas* were waiting on the road to create trouble. Muktanand Swami was oblivious to everything else. He was singing, "*V'hala rumjhum karta ka'an māre gher āvone…*" – "O beloved Krishna, come to my home, dancing…" He was singing and bowing down to everyone on his way. The *bawas* were completely disarmed by the humility and saintliness of Muktanand Swami. They all became quiet and forgot to harass him or beat him.

In the debate hall Muktanand Swami reminded Vedantacharya about debate at Vartal and asked him the same questions again. Vedantacharya was sweating, he confessed that he had made up the stories himself.

Vedantacharya was defeated in the presence of Maharaja Sayajirao. He told him off and exiled him from Vadodara State. Muktanand Swami was the victor. The Maharaja spent some days in the company of Muktanand Swami.

The devotees wrote a letter to Shriji Maharaj at Gadhada about the victory of Muktanand Swami. Maharaj had the letter read in the daily assembly. The devotees and sadhus became very happy. Maharaj praised Muktanand Swami heartily.

But two of the jealous sadhus could not stand this praise. Haryanand and

Nirvikalpanand murmured, “This can’t be called an extraordinary achievement. Even we could have defeated that Vedantacharya. A tiger can certainly kill a goat. But if he can kill another equally strong tiger, he should be called great. The Vedantacharya was an ordinary scholar. To defeat him is not a great achievement.”

Maharaj became very unhappy to hear this. He thought, “These two sadhus are very vain. Such vain people can’t have any place in the Satsang.” He thought, “The sadhus have become irresponsible, they are vying with one another. They don’t even respect their elders. There is no control over them. Therefore, I should not stay with such people. Let me return to some secluded forest area.”

Maharaj became disinterested. His face became pale. He stopped taking food and water. He started spending most of his time all alone in the Akshar Ordi. Motiba asked him, “Maharaj, why do you look so sad? If we have done something wrong, give us atonement but please accept food and remain cheerful.”

Maharaj replied, “We want to go away to the jungles. We don’t want to stay here.” Brahmanand Swami and Sura Khachar tried their best to provoke laughter but nothing could touch Maharaj. He said, “Now I don’t want to listen to anything except your consent to my plans of living in the forests.” All of them spoke to Maharaj, “Maharaj, we cannot allow you to go to forest; we won’t permit you to go. We don’t want to take the blame. You convene a gathering whenever you like of all the devotees from various regioms and put your proposal before them. If the entire Satsang grants you permission then only you can go.”

Maharaj conceded to their request. He sent letters to different regions and convened a meeting at Adraj in North Gujarat. He invited different groups and devotees from all the regions. He celebrated the Annakut festival and on the next day he put forward his proposal before the holy assembly. He said, “I don’t enjoy it any more in this place. I have lost all my interest. Nothing interests me. I have decided to leave you all and stay in the jungle.” When people heard him speak like this, some of the devotees fainted, tears rolled down the eyes of many men and women devotees. They all started wailing bitterly.

Then the elders said, “Maharaj, please don’t speak any more like this.This will cause a thousand heartbreaks. If we have done anything wrong, we are prepared to perform penance. We will act according to your wishes. All these sadhus have renounced the world for you. The women also ignored family traditions and social customs. Now whose shoulder will they seek? We are prepared to apologize with a straw in our mouth and pray that you pardon us for all the mistakes and wrongs committed by us consciously or unconsciously. Even then, if you are adamant and refuse to change your mind, and will desert us, these people will follow you like deer wherever you go.”

Maharaj took pity and said, “The Satsang has flourished like anything. Now we have so many sadhus and devotees. It is a great weight and responsibility to carry. Nobody is worried about the Satsang. Nobody is prepared to share this responsibility with me. On the contrary certain sadhus are criticizing their elders. They envy them and feel that they are on par with them and at times insult them. Therefore, someone should share this responsibility of maintaining order and discipline in the Satsang. I

need someone to make the people behave themselves. Someone who would reprimand where it is necessary and look after the whole Satsang. Someone should come forward to do this. I am ready to depart."

All of them spoke with one voice, "Maharaj, we will obey the commands of anyone, that you designate to lead us. But you should not forsake us." They all promised to follow him.

Maharaj made a special arrangement on the stage. He had cushions and pillows arranged and asked Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Paramchaitanyanand Swami to occupy their seats on the cushions and appointged them as *sadgurus*. He commanded the entire Satsang to obey these four *sadgurus*. People saw a ray of hope in this action. They all became happy and Maharaj too became happy. Maharaj once again became cheerful and gave comfort to the devotees. Here at Adraj, Maharaj instructed some carpenters and got some wooden bowls and waterpots and gave them first to the senior sadhus. Thus, he began the practice of giving *pattar* and *tumbdi* to the sadhus.

From Adraj, He went to Vadnagar, Visnagar, Ahmedabad, Aslali and Jetalpur. Here, besides the four *sadgurus* he appointed eight more sadhus as *sadgurus*. Thus the entire Satsang and the sadhus were divided into twelve groups under the charge and care of these twelve sadgurus. This increased the responsibility of the *sadgurus*. It was now their duty to look after the devotees and conduct religious discourses in their respective regions. This brought order and discipline in the Satsang.

2. Explained the Sadhu Dharma

Those were the days of Chaturmas. Thousands of devotees were coming to Gadhada for Maharaj's darshan. One day at the end of the assembly, a group of devotees was on its way to the *darbar* of Dada Khachar from Lakshmivadi. The devotees were passing through the market. A young boy had also accompanied his father. When the group reached a Jain *upashraya* (residence for Jain sadhus) the boy felt like spitting. The spit fell on one of the Jain sadhus who was watching the group. The Jain sadhu made a lot of fuss about it and complained, "These devotees of Swaminarayan spat on us. They have insulted us." There were some leading Jain businessmen. As soon as they heard this, they closed down their shops and declared a strike in protest.

Maharaj learnt about this incident. That poor little boy became very nervous. He thought he would be beaten by the elders. But Maharaj took him into confidence and affectionately advised him where to spit and where not to.

Then he directly went to see the offended Jain sadhu. He explained everything to the sadhu and said how the child had spat without any intention. He pleaded with the sadhu to forgive the child and accorded honour and respect to the Jain sadhu.

The Jain sadhu was convinced. He realized his sadhu dharma and asked his followers to withdraw the strike. Soon the market reopened and business returned to normal.

Such was Shriji Maharaj's great humility.

3. Maharaj's Love for Children

One day, Maharaj was about to have his hair cut in Gadhada.There was a ten-year-old Kanbi boy. He had great affection for Maharaj. He told the barber, "When you finish shaving Maharaj, will you please give me some of his hair as a memento?" The barber had said, "Yes dear, I shall give you some of his sacred hair."

Maharaj came for the shaving. He sat on a woollen carpet. The boy was watching him from a corner. When the shaving was over the barber forgot his promise to the child and collected all the hair in a bag and went away. As Maharaj was sitting there the boy could not remind the barber. He started crying at the loss. Maharaj turned his head and saw the boy crying in a corner.

Maharaj went to the boy, took him in his arms and asked him, "Dear, why are you crying?"

The child explained everything in detail. Maharaj replied, "What is there in that? Look, let me give you some hair from my *shikha*." With these words he cut some hair with a pair of scissors and gave it to the boy. The boy became very happy. He collected the hair in piece of cloth and pocketed it. He then prostrated before Maharaj and went home happily.

CHAPTER 19

1. Become Sahajanandi

All the sadhus were divided into twelve groups under the twelve *sadgurus*. Now the sadhus started following the commands of Maharaj under the supervision and guidance of their respective *sadgurus*. But this gave rise to a problem. Some sadhus started calling themselves by the name of the *sadguru* they were under, such as, Muktanandi, Brahmanandi etc. As a result groups formed.

Maharaj found an intelligent solution to this separatist tendency.

During one of the festivals, he convened a meeting of all the sadhus, and one after another, asked, “Whose disciple are you?” Each gave the name of his leader-*sadguru*. Then Maharaj remarked, “That means no one is Sahajanandi. Doesn’t it?”

This remark opened the eyes of all the sadhus. They replied, “No, Maharaj. It is not like that. We are all your disciples. We are in the different *sadguru* groups according to your own plan and wishes. We are all Sahajanandi first, then anything else.” This led to transfers of the sadhus between the *mandals* as Maharaj re-organized the sadhus into new *mandals* under the twelve sadgurus.

CHAPTER 20

1. Six Objectives

Maharaj was in Kariyani. Gopalanand Swami came there from Vadodara for the darshan of Maharaj. Maharaj got up from his seat, embraced him and offered him cold water. Then he took Gopalanand Swami to Akshar Ordi and asked him to sit by his side. He asked other sadhus and devotees to go outside. He said to Nishkulanand Swami, "You, too, go out and start cutting stone for the washing area which is under construction behind the gate." Then he closed the door of the Akshar Ordi and explained to Gopalanand Swami, the six objectives behind his incarnation on the earth:

1. To spread our supreme *upasana* (worship) and supreme *jnan* (wisdom) throughout the world.
2. To guide the followers of preceding avatars to worship our *swarup* and so send them directly to Akshardham.
3. To liberate Bhaktidevi and Dharmadev from the harrassment of the evil people and bless them with the bliss of our *murti*.
4. To revive and spread the long forgotten Ekantik Dharma that consists of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti with an understanding of God's glory.
5. To give the fruits of the austerities and bhakti in the form of our darshan to those ascetics and yogis who have been worshiping God since eons; to fulfil the wishes of those *mumukshus* who have great affection for God; and also to shower them with love.
6. To establish on this earth the the tradition of Ekantik Sadhus who will forever sustain Ekantik Dharma and keep the path to *moksha* to Akshardham open forever; to build *shikharbaddh* mandirs for worship; to give shastras narrating my divine incidents and expounding dharma and *jnan*.

Nishkulanand Swami overheard all these six objectives through a slit in the door.

Then Maharaj celebrated the Diwali festival in Kariyani. At night everything was illumined with thousands of lamps and Maharaj was surrounded by his devotees. A great devotee named Premabai from Port Diu came carrying *paduka* (sandals), *chhatra* (umbrella), *chamar* (whisks), precious clothes with artistic workmanship and ornaments of gold for Maharaj. Maharaj knew her feelings, so he went to accept her offerings. He kept them with him for some time but it was a practice with him not to keep any precious thing for long. He would always hand it over to someone else. He handed over the precious clothes and ornaments to Dinanath Bhatt saying, "*Krishnarpan* (Given to you in the name of Shri Krishna)." Someone in the assembly felt envious about this, so Maharaj preached to the assembly against vanity and jealousy.

2. Vegetable Festival at Loya

Maharaj arrived in Loya in the month of Kartik. He stayed in the *darbars* of Sandha Patel and Sura Khachar. In Loya, he used to sit in the space between two neem trees and conduct discourses. During his two months stay in Loya, he frequently invited sadhus from different towns and organized vegetable festivals *(shakotsavas*). Under one of the neem trees, he would set up five stoves and prepare brinjal-curry using five *maunds* of brinjals and twelve *maunds* of ghee. He would prepare the curry in five huge vessels and then serve the devotees himself.

Maharaj celebrated the Vasant Panchmi festival and sprayed colours. In the evening some artists came with their puppet theatre. The leader of the troupe requested Maharaj to grant them permission to present a puppet show in his divine presence. Maharaj replied, "You stage the scene of the wedding of Rukmani in your puppet show." So, the puppeteers started manipulating their strings but no puppet would move. The lead puppeteer fell at the feet of Maharaj and said, "Maharaj! You are God. Our lives depend on you. On you depends the beating of our pulse and heart. All the living beings, men and creatures, are nothing but puppets dancing to your tunes. Therefore, please be merciful." Maharaj cast his divine glance at the puppet master. Life returned to his fingers and the puppets started dancing. Maharaj witnessed the puppet show. Brahmanand Swami instantly composed the verse. "*Nen katāri, nen katāri, salunā Shyāmni…*" to commemorate the divine incident.

3. Reunion of the Brothers

Maharaj was residing in Loya. During this time two sadhus had gone on a pilgrimage to Ayodhya and Chappaiya, and from there had sent Ichchhramjibhai for Maharaj's darshan. His face was similar to Maharaj's, body was slim, average height and his walk style resembled Maharaj's. The two sadhus had previously informed Maharaj, but he did not react to their news. Maharaj did not move from the *darbar* of Sangha Patel. So Muktanand Swami escorted Ichchharambhai to Maharaj. On the darshan of Maharaj he froze. "That's my Ghanshyam!" he exclaimed and ran to him. He fell at the feet of Maharaj and clasped his feet. "Ghannshyam Bhaiya! Bhaiya! Bhaiya! He was weeping incessantly:

Maharaj freed his feet and said, "Who is this?"

But, Ichchharambhai was constantly muttering, "Bhaiya Ghanshyam! Ghanshyam! You left us."

Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami lifted Ichchharambhai to his feet. Everyone's eyes were filed with tears of joy on seeing his divine meeting and no one uttered a word.

Then Muktanand Swami addressed Maharaj, "Maharaj! This is your younger brother, Ichchharambhai, who has arrived. Please be seated in this hall where we have laid out a seat for you.

Maharaj was still silent, Muktanand Swami, and Nityanand Swami held Maharaj's hand and escorted him top the prepared seat. They led his brother there too.

He was still crying. Nityanand Swami said, "Maharaj! You are the Lord! You are carefree and left everything effortlessly, but he is human. After so many years of

separation he is overcome with emotion, so please break your silence and at least speak to him. You are not a renunciant; you are God.

"But our nature is like that of a renunciant. Whoever we renounce, we do not remember," Maharaj said in a very serious tone.

However, due to the insistence of the sadhus, Maharaj met Ichchharambhai. Ichchharambhai embraced Maharaj. This blissful divine embrace gave great joy to Ichchharambhai.

Then he narrated how to he had reached there from Chhapaiya with Mayatitanand Swami.

Five day later news arrived that Rampratapbhai was also on his way. When he was a few kilometres from Loya he dismounted from the horse and walked.

Sura Khachar, with some Darbars and a group of sadhus went to welcome him. Drums, cymbals and shahnai were palyed, producing pleasant music. The sadhus sang bhajans. Rampratapbhai was thinking, "Bhagwan was born at our home, and we could not recognize him and people in the far away region of Gujarat recognized him."

On reaching Maharaj's residence in Loya Rampratapbhai had darshan of Maharaj and embraced him. The pain in the heart of so many years of separation was soothed on embracing him. Rampratapbhai would not release Maharaj from his embrace. It was an emotional meeting. With tears in his eyes he cried, "Ghanshyam Bhaiya! You went away. You did not even remember anyone." Maharaj was listening calmly.

The sadhus and devotees were awestruck, and were looking at the divine flow of love. It was a meeting that surpassed even the meeting of Ram and Bharat. This scene was captured in everyone's heart.

On the full moon day of the month Maha there was an eclipse of the moon. Once the eclipse was over, Maharaj and the devotees went to bathe in the Bhadra river. After bathing for a while Maharaj had a meeting and delivered a discourse.

Meanwhile, a wealthy but vain lady offered Maharaj a beautiful white *angarkhu* to wear and insisted that he should wear it. On seeing her insistence, Maharaj asked, "For how long soould I wear it!"

The lady replied, "Maharaj! Till it is torn, wear this *angarakhu* every day."

Maharaj complied and said, "Very good. Let me put it on. On putting on the *angarkhu* and seing the lady's vanity, Maharaj tightened the strings and twisted his body slightly. The cloth of he apparel stretched and was torn. The woman's pride was smashed.

4. Illness at Panchala

At the end of the month of Maha, Maharaj went to Panchala for the Fuldol festival.

In Panchala, Maharaj stayed at Jhinabhai's *darbar*, where he bestowed the choicest blessings on the devotees.

Maharaj, followed by a group of sadhus, went for bath at Gopi Talav. The earth there resembled sandalwood paste. Maharaj had some earth collected, then prepared small balls and gave one ball each to the sadhus and said, "From today you shall apply the *tilak* mark of our Uddhav Sampraday on your forehead."

Some of the sadhus mistook the clay balls to be *prasadi* and swallowed them. On the next day, the sadhus went to the assembly with various marks on their foreheads. Maharaj laughed at them. Then he called Gunatitanand Swami and applied an *urdhva pundra* mark and a round *chandlo* on his forehead, stood him in front of the sadhus and said, "This is our *tilak*. No God can compare with me and no sadhu can compare with this sadhu (Gunatitanand Swami)."

At that time, Anandji Sanghedia had come from Mangrol with a bag of *pattars*. He himself had made these *pattars*. He gave them to those who had no *pattar* or whose *pattar* was broken. All these sadhus were given *pattars* and *tumbdi*.

On Fagun *vad* 11, everyone stayed awake and he gave darshan of his *murti* to the sadhus and then the sadhus took leave.

On the first day of Chaitra Maharaj asked, "Why have you called my relations here? A renunciant has no attachment with relations once he had renounced. Moreover, now I am old and this body will not last for long." With these words, he became disinterested and invited illness. He started remaining aloof and avoided people.

Sura Khachar learned about Maharaj's illness. He came quickly to see Maharaj. At that time Maharaj was having a shave on the bank of a lake at Khokhra. Sura Khachar went there for darshan. But Maharaj refused to see him. Sura Khachar started crying. Maharaj also shed tears of love and the place where these divine drops fell is known as 'Bindu Sarovar'.

Nothing would cure Maharaj. Muktanand Swami prayed, "Maharaj! Even ordinary *bawas* and renunciants establish *maths* and *ashrams* before they die. You have constructed just one shrine at Ahmedabad. You, Purushottam Narayan, have come to this earth and if you don't leave any mark here, the purpose of your incarnation will not be served."

Then Muktanand Swami said, "We have all decided that so the roots of this Sampraday remain till the end of time we should build *shikarbaddh* mandirs and for their day-to-day running appoint *acharyas*, and for the progress of the Sampraday, write shastras.

After a while Maharaj said mildly, "Because of your resolve, this tradition will be established in the Sampraday. But do know this; we have no affection towards our relations. The bodily relations are not our true relations."

Thereafter Maharaj recovered and left to go for Gadhada.

CHAPTER 21

1. His Own Life Story

A radical change was brought about in the public life on account of social and religious reforms initiated by Maharaj. Compared to Maharaj's sadhus and *paramhansas* other *bawas* looked tarnished. The *maths* of the *bawas* and *vairagis* started closing down. The people realized the true ways of religion. Maharaj conducted many *yagnas* without animal sacrifice. This angered the orthodox Brahmins. Maharaj took into his fold people belonging to lower classes and taught them progressive ideas. As a result, people belonging to the upper classes, at times, showed contempt towards Maharaj. Such disgruntled elements spread many fabricated lies about Maharaj. They simply could not stand Maharaj's popularity with the masses. Therefore, just with a view to oppose, the Brahmins, *vairagis* and *bawas* started anti-Maharaj propaganda.

"Swaminarayan is no God. He is a magician. He has at his command Babra the ghost, and so guillible people are following him. Swaminarayan is not a Brahmin. He has no right to perform *yagnas*. Swaminarayan is a shoemaker. Therefore Kathi, Koli, Kanbi, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemakers and others are with him." Many such improper and fabricated stories were spread. Maharaj remained indifferent to such rumours and propaganda, but the *paramhansas* at times faced great difficulties in carrying out their noble work of spreading the Satsang teachings and philosophy. As a result, some *paramhansas* and leading devotees said to Maharaj, "Maharaj, Shobharam Shastri and estate manager Chimanravji Janardan of Vadodara have great influence on the Brahmins and scholars. We request you to narrate all these things in a letter to them. They will be able to halt the false rumours and people will be able to see the reality." On the insistence of the *paramhansas* on Wednesday, Posh *sud* 2, Samvat 1878, Maharaj wrote letters to Shobharam Shastri and Chimanravji Janardan. He wrote in the letter:

"Please accept Jai Swaminarayan from Swami Shri Sahajanandji at Gadhada. I have received your letter sent through the *paramhansas* and noted the contents. We are pleased to learn that you are completely convinced about our satsang. We also learnt that your fellow community members from the south insist upon knowing about my caste, family and Sampraday. In order to help you clear the doubts regarding this from the minds of the people, I am writing about my birthplace, and the traditions of our faith.

"My birthplace is in the Sarvar region, north of Ayodhya. The river Manorama flows in that region. By this river there is a place of pilgrimage called Makhaouta. At a distance of one mile to the north of this holy place there is a village called Chhapaiya. This village belongs to our maternal uncle. In this village there lives a Sarvariya Brahmin named Hariprasad Pande. He is a Samvedi Brahmin, his *gotra* is *savarna*, he is

of the Kauthumi *shakha,* and Bhargav, Vaitahvya and Savetas are its three groups. I am a son of that Hariprasad Brahmin. My grandfather had received Itar village from King Sirnet, therefore, our surname is Itarna Pande (Pande of Itar).

"I left home on a pilgrimage... while travelling like this I met a *tridandi* sannyasi called Jiyar Swami at Totadri in the Dravid region (South India). I became his disciple, and from there I travelled further and performed *panchtirthi* before reaching Girnar. Here I met Shri Ramanand Swami... this Ramanand Swami taught me how to worship Nar-Narayan Dev and gave me the *paramhansa diksha*.

"Thus, Gopalanand Swami (guru of Ramanand Swami's guru, Atmanand Swami) revealed the secrets of Sampraday to Atmanand Swami. Atmanand Swami who had learnt about the significace and secrets from other gurus of the Sampradaya, imparted knowledge to my guru Shri Ramanand Swami and Shri Ramanand Swami in turn imparted it to me. Thus our Sampradaya is known as the Uddhav Sampraday. The way Uddhav used his body merely as covering (for the *atma*) and followed the rules of *brahmacharya,* etc., in the same manner my sadhus and I lead our lives according to these rules. Our chief *acharya*, Uddhav, is a *paramhansa* initiated with the bhakti tradition. The householders to whom we preach our religion are given vows to shun liquor, meat eating, adultery, stealing and to observe social purity. We make them shun these things and preach to them the religion of non-violence.

"We have accepted in our Uddhav Sampradaya the Shrimad Bhagvat Puran, the Mokshadharma in the Shantiparva and the Bhagvad Gita as sacred books of the Sampraday. They are looked upon as *samhitas* for the *paramhansas*. I and my sadhus act according to the teachings in these three great books. Secondly, our Sampraday is pure in this way. If anyone makes an honest inquiry or raises just doubts we shall not deceive him.

"Therefore, now, if any *shastri* or *purani* asks you for any explanation you can give this explanation clearly and may read this letter to them. Please remember us to the Shastri from Kashi and to Joshi Zumakhram and convey our Jai Shri Swaminarayan to them. Please do read this letter to them. The wise need not be told much."

2. Consecration of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev

In the month of Kartik in Samvat 1876, Maharaj arrived at Ahmedabad via Vadtal. Collector, Mr Dunlop, asked Maharaj, "Swaminarayan Bhagwan, how is it that you haven't established any centre in such a big city as Ahmedabad. Please kindly construct one in this city. Build a *math* or a mandir here, so that your sadhus and devotees can stay here comfortably, and celebrate festivals. Ask for as much land as you need and wherever you want it in Ahmedabad."

Maharaj chose a place called Pathakvadi in Navavas. He said, "If we get this land we will build a mandir here and install the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev. In those days the British used to give land on a lease of 99 years. But Mr Dunlop gave it on a permanent basis and made a deed to that effect on a copper plate.

After some time Maharaj built a *dharmashala* for the sadhus. With clear instructions to build a one-domed mandir in which the *murtis* of Lord Nar-Narayan Dev were to be

installed, he commanded Anand Swami to begin the construction work.

In accordance with the wishes of Maharaj, Anand Swami supervised the construction of a one-domed stone mandir. When the mandir was completed, he wrote a letter to Maharaj, who sent invitation letters to the devotees in all the towns and villages and invited them to Ahmedabad. Maharaj himself led a big group and came to Ahmedabad. In Ahmedabad, Maharaj was taken out in a huge procession. On Fagun *sud* 3, Samvat 1878 (24 February 1822 CE), Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev with much fanfare and according to the Vedic traditions. Thus in the history of Satsang, the first *shikharbaddh* mandir was inauguratted in Ahmedabad.

Having consecrated the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev, Maharaj decided to arrange a feast for the Brahmins, but he didn't have enough money. Maharaj said, "If some devotee can help then we would like to arrange a *chorashi*."

Somebody suggested the name of Laldas Gora. Maharaj called Laldas Sheth and said, "We have installed Nar-Narayan Dev. Now we wish to feed the Brahmins by serving them with food. We want to arrange a *chorashi* for Brahmins. Could you arrange for the money?" Laldas Sheth replied, "Maharaj, I can certainly arrange for money, but I will have to consult my wife." Maharaj replied, "All right."

Laldas Sheth went home and asked his wife. She replied, "What do you think of me? Why did you tell Maharaj that you would need my consent? God has given us the money. It belongs to God and God has asked for it. We must give it to him."

Laldas Sheth became very happy and presented seven thousand rupees at the feet of Maharaj. Maharaj immediaely made arrangements and sent invitations to each and every house. He sent riders upto Jetalpur and invited the Brahmins. Besides the Brahmins, there were thousands of devotees who had come from all over Gujarat, Kathiawad and Kutch.

On the auspicious day of Fagun *sud* 5, all arrangements for the grand *chorashi* dinner were made near the Kankaria Lake. The Brahmins started arriving from different regions. The Brahmins were served with *churma* ladoos, *dal*, rice, curry, beans and *bhajiyas*

When the Brahmins had finished their meals, the devotees were served. After dinner, Maharaj came to the assembly and the devotees performed his *pujan* and presented offerings. After *pujan* the *kotharis* counted the gift money. The total collection was Rs. 7000.50 paise. Maharaj said to Ladha Thakker, "From this money, return Rs. 7000 to Laldas Gora." Maharaj lovingly persuaded Laldas Gora to accept the money back. When he saw that only half a rupee was left out in balance, Ladha Thakker remarked, "This much amount will not get us even the food that we need for our journey." Maharaj replied, "So long as I am with you, you need not worry about food."

Thus, after the *chorashi* Maharaj left Ahmedabad on that same night for Jetalpur. Here, Maharaj, by his divine will, fell ill. He had a slight fever. He stayed here for a night, took a little food and left. On Fagan *sud* 8, Maharaj reached Ganesh Dholka near Koth. There, he caressed the right-hand turned trunk of Ganapati in the mandir. He rested under a *rayan* tree on a cot for some time. Then he sat in a lotus posture,

introspecting. He withdrew all his senses into his inner consciousness, mentally negated all his activities. As if there had been no gathering at all at Kankaria, the memory of everything was erased. In this way he cured his illness.

3. How Will You Describe Us?

It was evening. Maharaj was addressing the usual prayer meeting at Gadhada, outside the Vasudev-Narayan room. The holy assembly was discussing whether to call Maharaj a God or an ascetic.

Maharaj suddenly got up and started throwing all his ornaments towards the sadhus and the clothes towards the women devotees. On seeing this Brahmanand Swami remarked, "Maharaj! You are very clever, what will the sadhus do with the ornaments? Of what use are your clothes to the women? You have thrown towards us things which are of no use to us." Everyone burst into laughter.

But to the surprise of the assembly Maharaj appeared there partly dressed as an ascetic and partly as a king. He had put on a *gatariyu* (representing a sadhu's dress) and a *jama* (representing a king's dress), and held a rosary in one hand and sword in the other and had a *pagh* on his head. Then he asked the assembly, "Now tell me what will you call us? A king or an ascetic?"

The assembly replied, "Neither, Maharaj." Maharaj then replied, "There is nobody like me. All those who preceded were merely avatars. But I am the *avatari*." Every one realized the difference between avatar and *avatari*.

4. Monkey Telling Beads

Maharaj arrived at Vartal from Gadhada to ceberate the Ram Navmi (the birthday of Lord Rama) festival.

One evening Maharaj was addressing the holy assembly on the bank of Dharu Lake. A monkey came there leaping and sat on a tree branch. Looking at the monkey the Kathis remarked, "Maharaj, Lord Ramchandra probably had such monkeys in his army. I wonder how such monkeys could have fought using weapons?"

Maharaj replied, "Certainly, only such monkeys by the grace of God attain the power to fight in the war." The Kathis who were listening to Maharaj observed, "If it is true then make this monkey perform some divine action."

Maharaj cast a divine glance at the monkey and the animal jumped down on the ground and fell at the feet of Maharaj and sat before him. Maharaj gave him a rosary. The monkey sat in a lotus posture and started telling the beads, while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. Then the monkey recited some verses from the Tulsi Ramayan. The Kathis once again remarked, "But one more question. How could such a small animal lift the Gandhmadan Mountain?" Once again, Maharaj threw a divine glance at the monkey, and it attained a huge body and disappeared in the sky, lifting the Gandhman Mountain on his palm. The assembly was wonderstruck by such a rare divine spectacle.

After the festival, Maharaj laid the foundation-stone for a mandir. Maharaj decided to install his own *murti* himself. The devotees of Gujarat wholeheartedly pledged

money for this cause.

5. Sahajanand, the Sun

In Panchala, on the occasion of Holi, Maharaj assumed multiple forms of himself and participated in a *ras* with his sadhus. He celebrated this festival by serving jaggery, rice and ghee to the entire town. He fed thousands of Brahmins, sadhus and devotees. They all felt happy after taking the meals. Maharaj enquired, “Is anyone left out?” Those who were in charge of the kitchen arrangements replied, “Maharaj, we have visited all the places and have made sure that no one is left out.”

But how can anyone escape Maharaj’s attention, care and concern? He saw some poor people in rags wandering on the banks of the river. He pointed out towards them and asked, “Have you fed them? Who are they?” One of the organizers replied, “Maharaj they are Vaghris. They live in the forest. They kill goats, hens, rabbits and deer. They are sinners, since they kill and eat those animals. They are always found wandering like this. Why should we feed such sinners?”

Maharaj replied, “The sun rises for everyone. It gives light to the holy and the unholy alike. The rain falls on everybody’s fields. In the same manner, here is the Sun in the person of Sahajanand. We want to liberate everyone. Therefore, go across the river, call them and satisfy them by serving food to them.”

Two of the devotees went across the river and returned with Vaghris. Maharaj himself served food and showed great affection towards them. They kept the *murti* of Maharaj forever in their hearts and became very happy. At the time of their end, they remembered Maharaj and earned salvation.

CHAPTER 22

1. Consecration of Murtis in Bhuj

After the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad, Maharaj returned to Gadhada, visiting several places on the way. At that time a group of devotees from Kutch had come there. They prayed, “Maharaj, please do construct such a big mandir in Kutch. We will give you all possible help.” Looking to their enthusiasm, Maharaj said, “You start building a mandir in Bhuj. We are sending this Vaishnavanand Swami. He will give you all necessary assistance.”

The Kutchi devotees in Bhuj worked with zeal and in no time a beautiful mandir was constructed. They informed Maharaj and invited him for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. Maharaj accepted the invitation. Maharaj led a large group of devotees from Gujarat and Kathiawad and proceeded towards Kutlch. Accompanying Maharaj for the *murti-pratishtha* were many on horses, sadhus on foot, about 150 bullock-carts full of devotees and fifteen to twenty bullock-carts full of rations. In Bhuj, Maharaj stayed at Hirjibhai’s house.

On Vaishakh *sud* 5, Samvat 1879 (15 May 1823 ce), Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev in Bhuj. The whole of Kutch sang in praise of Maharaj. He stayed in Kutch for nearly fifteen days. As Maharaj was visiting Kutch after many years, the devotees were simply overjoy beyond belief. He bestowed divine bliss on his devotees before returning to Gadhada via Halwad, Chotila, Nagadka and Loya.

CHAPTER 23

1. Our Jadbharat

Maharaj held a grand celebration for Janmashtmi in Gadhada. For this occasion, Muktanand Swami composed and sang bhajans. Maharaj stayed in Gadhada and celebrated Diwali and Annakut as well. From Dhanteras to Annakut, Maharaj sat every night outside the room of Vasudev-Narayan. The sadhus filled the lamps with fuel. They designed *rangolis,* and composed and sang bhajans about Diwali. Maharaj used to go to where the cows were being milked. If not enough milk had been obtained, Maharaj himself would take a container and milk. In the evening he rode his horse at Lakshmi Vadi. When everyone was seated for dinner on the evening of Annakut, Maharaj said, "All the junior sadhus first serve and the seniors sit to eat." In this way he served *jalebis* to everyone.

Soon it was the month of Magshar. In Gadhada, a devotee offered Maharaj a coarse, thick and rough blanket. It was so coarse that if it rubbed against the skin it would cause bruises on it. But as the devotee had offered it with great love, Maharaj covered himself with it during discourses everyday.

Some of the devotees tactfully tried to make Maharaj part with the rough blanket. Maharaj gave them softer shawls, but refused to give the coarse blanket.

It was the day of Punam. Early morning when Maharaj was discoursing, a devotee came there with a smooth shawl for him. Muktanand Swami confided to Gunatitanand Swami, "The blanket which Maharaj is using is very heavy, coarse, and rough. It rubs the skin and blood comes out. Therefore, you try to make Maharaj part with it." Gunatitanand Swami replied, "I'll do it."

When that devotee offered the soft shawl to Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami asked Maharaj to give his coarse blanket to him. But Maharaj said "No." Thereupon Muktanand Swami remarked, "Maharaj! This Nirgunanand is like Jadbharat. He prefers this coarse blanket. It'll be good if you can give it to him." Maharaj burst into laughter and said, "Take this, our Jadbharat." With these words he covered Gunatitanand Swami with the coarse blanket.

2. Re-Union with Dharmakul

During the second half of Maghshar, devotees informed Maharaj, "Maharaj, the members of the Dharmakul are coming here."

Maharaj mounted his mare and with some devotees left from Kariyani towards Samadhiyala and under the *khijdo* tree near Dhar village (there is a memorial shrine there) met Suvasini Bhabhi (Rampratapbhai's wife), Variyalibai (Ichchharambhai's wife), Raghuvriji, Ayodhyaprasadji and others who had arived from Ayodhya.

Suvasini Bhabhi was overcome with joy and started crying wondering, "Am I seeing

a dream?"

Maharaj went to Akshar Ordi (at Kariyani) and sat for his meals in the eastern corner. Suvasini Bhabhi had the opportunity of serving the food to Maharaj after 32 years.

Then Maharaj returned to Gadhada via Kundal and Sarangpur.

3. Not Mud but Sandalwood Paste

Maharaj celebrated Fuldol in Vartal. At that time the construction work of the Vartal mandir was in progress. All the sadhus and devotees were helping in this work. Maharaj used to sit in a chair where the work was in progress. He used to give inspiration, energy and guidance to those who were working there. Maharaj was pleased with the selfless service of his followers. He said, "You have toiled much. Let us embrace each other."

Bhaktipriyanand Swami remarked, "But Maharaj our bodies are soiled with mud." Maharaj smilingly replied, "It isn't mud, it is *chandan* (sandalwood paste). Therefore, come, all of you who have mud on your bodies. Let us embrace each other."

Maharaj embraced all the sadhus and devotees who were serving, even though their bodies were soiled with mud.

Gunatitanand Swami was watching this scene from a distance. Maharaj said to him, 'Swami! Come, let me embrace you." Then Swami replied, "Maharaj! There's no mud on my body." Looking at his unassuming and innocent personality, Maharaj embraced him, although his body was not soiled with mud. In Vartal, Maharaj himself had carried the bricks on his head.

CHAPTER 24

1. Consecration of Shri Lakshmi-Narayan Dev

The mandir at Vartal was completed. Brahmanand Swami wrote a letter to Maharaj to choose an auspicious day for the *murti-pratishtha* and invited him to Vartal. Maharaj consulted Mayaram Bhatt and decided to consecrate the *murtis* on Kartik *sud* 12, Samvat 1881 (3 November 1824 ce). Maharaj informed Aksharanand Swami accordingly and gave him certain necessary instructions for the ceremony.

Aksharanand Swami sent invitations on behalf of Maharaj to the devotees of different towns and villages. Maharaj arrived at Vartal from Gadhada. He conducted a *yagna* for five days. With great fanfare the *murtis* were consecrated. Maharaj also consecrated his own *murti* as 'Harikrishna' for the first time in Vartal. This is a unique instance of his supreme divinity.

At the end of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, Maharaj, honoured the sculptors with gifts and blessings.

2. Reception at Surat

At the time of the *murti-pratishtha* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev in Vartal Maharaj had accepted the loving invitation of the devotees from Surat to visit their city.

Thus, Maharaj left Vartal for Surat on Kartik *vad* 2 (8 November 1824 ce).

He was accompanied by Shobharam Shastri, Nityanand Swami, Bhagvadanand Swami and other learned sadhus and devotees. On the way, they stayed at Bochasan for one night. They also bathed in the sacred river Narmada at Bharuch. From here, they took a boat and arrived at Surat. They landed on the bank of the Tapi and stayed at Rustom Baug belonging to a Parsi gentleman. It was Kartik *vad* 7. The devotees from Surat city came to attend the *satsang* assembly at Rustom Baug. Maharaj said, "We will visit Surat city tomorrow. By that time, the group of *paramhansas* from Vartal should have reached Surat." The devotees fell at the feet of Maharaj and returned to the city to make preparations for the reception. In the evening the Parsi devotee, Khan Ardesharbhai, sent a letter to Maharaj, "We will come to welcome you to our city. Please accept our invitation."

In the evening, Nishkulanand Swami fixed a swing on the branch of a tamarind tree and rocked Maharaj. Then Maharaj convened a meeting of all the sadhus and devotees and said, "You must always respect one another. You are all like Dhruva, Prahlad and Ambrish; therefore, you should not feel ill towards anyone. You should not feel jealous of others and you should maintain unity. You should treat one another with utmost compassion and purity of heart. If you can do this much there will be no discord in the Satsang."

He continued, "You, the sadhus should maintain respect for seniors. Observe the

rules and regulations of your dharma rigorously and sincerely. Keep your actions pure. No sadhu shall demand anything from a devotee. Even if you are in need of a book, knife, needle, thread, a pair of scissors or any other thing you should not ask a devotee to give it to you. You should approach the *sadguru* of your group or the *mahant* and ask for your requirements. They will arrange to get you the things from the right persons and you will definitely get the things that you need. A sadhu should spend day and night in discourses, bhajan, *seva* and exchange of views on matters of religion."

The next day, the Parsi devotee, Ardeshar Kotwal, his brother, Pirusha Kotwal, Bhalchandra Sheth, Hargovind Patel, Mehta Jagjivanbhai Sheth, Lakshmichand, Marfatiya Dayaram, Manekchandbhai and many other leading citizens and devotees came with an English band to receive Maharaj. Maharaj mounted on his Manki. They seated Maharaj in a *mena* and a grand procession was taken out in honour of Maharaj.

On the auspicious day of Ekadashi, a religious debate was organized between the scholars from the city and the *paramhansas*. The *paramhansas* won the debate. Even then Maharaj honoured the opponent scholars and gave them *dakshina* and garments.

Maharaj visited the houses of Ardeshar and Pirusha and gave them divine bliss.

The District Judge of Surat, Mr Anderson, sent an invitation to Maharaj to visit his house. Maharaj complied with his prayer and went to his house, and blessed him. Mr Anderson took off his hat and offered a garland of pure roses and a bouquet of flowers to Maharaj. He sprayed scent on Maharaj and also offered dry fruits from Arabia. Maharaj briefly addressed the congregation. Then Mr Anderson turned to Muktanand Swami and Dada Khachar, and said, "I had met Swaminarayan Maharaj at the time of your Dabhan *yagna* (Samvat 1866; 1810 ce). At that time, he was quite youthful and slim. But now he looks older. I am lucky to have his darshan after so many years. You must look after him. We need such great men in this country."

An officer called Mr Jevan, whose bungalow was next to Mr Anderson's, invited Maharaj to grace his house. Maharaj went to his house, where he was offered a bottle of English scent and an imported handkerchief. Maharaj blessed him and returned to his lodgings. Here, Ardeshar Kotwal, put many questions to Maharaj and Maharaj satisfied him and convinced him about his divinity by giving him appropriate answers.

On Maghshar *sud* 2, Maharaj returned to Rustom Baug. From this day, Rustom Baug came to be known as Narayan Baug.

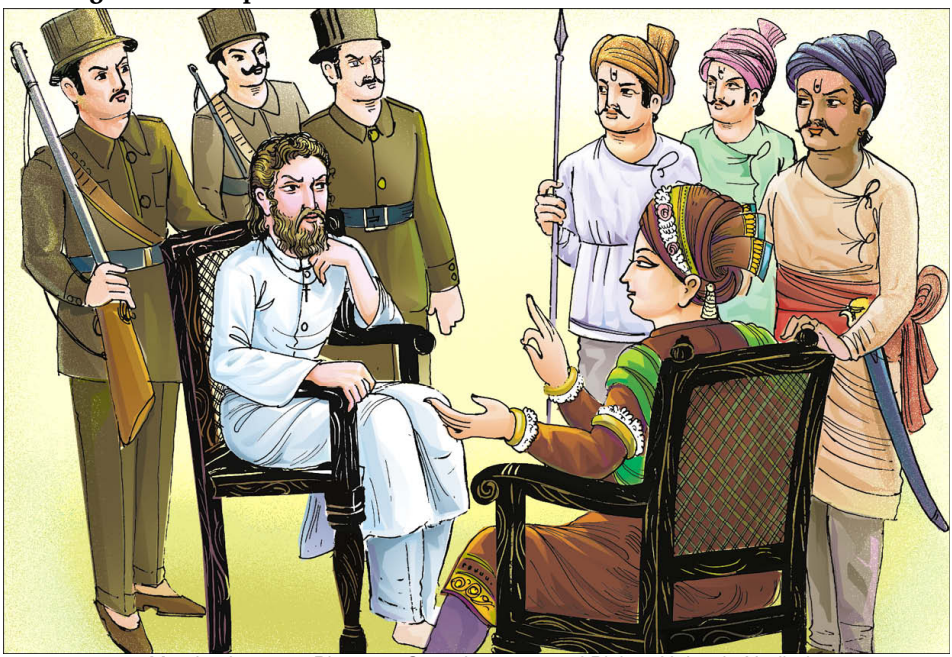
Maharaj convened a meeting of the devotees from Surat at Narayan Baug and discoursed to them. At the end of the meeting, Ardeshar Kotwal got up and prayed, "O Maharaj! You are God. You are Ahurmazda. Just as Lord Rama had given his *chakhdi* to his brother, Bharat, to worship, please give me some memento so that I may worship and remember you daily. Maharaj heard his sincere prayer and presented him his *pagh*. Ardeshar was delighted, like a poor man becomes happy on getting a rich treasure.[1]

Karsandas and Jivabhai of Surat prepared a new *pagh* for Maharaj. Then Maharaj led the group back to Gadhada.

Maharaj celebrated Vasant Panchmi (Maha *sud* 5) in Gadhada and then left for Bhatvadar with the marriage party of Dada Khachar on Maha *sud* 8. To ensure that the lineage of his great devotee, Dada Khachar, continues, Maharaj had arranged for him

to marry a second time. After celebrating Dada Khachar's marriage to Jasumati on Maha *sud* 10 Maharaj returned to Gadhada.

3. Meeting with Bishop Heber



Meeting between Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Bishop Heber in Nadiad

At this time the chief of the Christian missions, Rev. Bishop Heber was touring Northern India and areas near Calcutta to spread Christianity. He then came to Gujarat. The Collector of Vadodara, Mr Williamson, informed the Bishop about the social reforms and religious reforms brought about by Shriji Maharaj. Williamson said to the Bishop, "Swaminarayan has done a wonderful job. I came to know about his popularity as a religious reformer only after his visit to Vadodara. He is very much loved by the people. His preachings and sermons are superior to those we find in the Hindu shastras. He preaches to practise pure action and look towards women with respect and piety. He preaches against theft and killings. All troubled districts where he has worked have become most law-abiding."

No sooner had he heard about Maharaj, a light flashed in the heart of Bishop Heber. He became very eager to see Maharaj. He sent a message to Maharaj and sought an interview with him at Nadiad.

At that time, Maharaj was in Dabhan. Maharaj sent some baskets of sweets and garlands to Bishop Heber. The Bishop looked at all the six devotees. They were Bania, Kathi, Koli-thakur, Rajput, Rayat and Muslim devotees with a *tilak* on their foreheads. They stood there before the Bishop with folded hands. Bishop Heber was surprised to find these people of diverse culture and upbringing living together. He wondered, "How could Muslim, Kathi, Koli and Baniya come together?"

With a great sense of wonder he inquired, "Are you all devotees of Swaminarayan?"

They replied, “Although we belong to different communities, we are all devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He has taught us to treat one another as brothers and live together in peace and harmony.” (From *Narrative of Journey Through the Other Provinces of India*, page 107, by Bishop Heber.)

This phenomenon was beyond the imagination of Bishop Heber. He was convinced that Maharaj’s activities must be really great. A man who could infuse the noble principle of fraternity or brotherhood among the people who could never live together in peace and harmony must be divine. He eagerly inquired, “When will Maharaj call on me?” The devotees replied, “Maharaj shall come to meet you tomorrow morning at eleven o’clock.” Bishop Heber became very happy and eagerly awaited Maharaj’s arrival.

It was Sunday 26 March 1825. Maharaj mounted on his mare and started from Dabhan for Nadiad. He was accompanied by some three hundred devotees. There were about fifty armed bodyguards and the rest were sadhus, devotees and Kathis. Bishop Heber was greatly impressed by the large number of Maharaj’s devotees. He bowed down before Maharaj, shook hands with him and offered him a seat on a chair made of black ebony. Maharaj signaled to the devotees to sit down on the floor.

When the Bishop saw the kindly figure of Maharaj and such a big number of dedicated and faithful devotees, he thought, “My bodyguards do take care of me. But they do not know me nor do they really love me. Whereas, these bodyguards of Maharaj are unpaid and yet they have willingly surrendered themselves to him. What a great qualitative difference there is between us from the religious point of view.”

Then Bishop Heber said, “Maharaj, if you don’t mind will you please explain to me your principles?” Maharaj explaining his philosophy said to him, “God is one. He has created this world. He is supporting and sustaining everything and dwells in the hearts of everyone. He is omnipresent. We and all the Hindus know this God as Parabrahman. This God has appeared in different regions as different incarnations.” Concluding, Maharaj said, “The incarnation of that God known by people as Krishna or Surya is me.” Bishop Heber’s focus was entirely upon Maharaj. He thought, “Let me give a copy of the Bible to Maharaj.” But he hadn’t any Gujarati or Hindi version of it with him. Thus Bishop Heber had the darshan of Maharaj. It was the result of his good deeds and noble actions.

4. Dwarika’s Gomti in Vartal

Dwarika is one of the important places of pilgrimage in India. Tradionally it is believed that after going on the pilgrimages of Badri-Kedar in the North, Jagannathpuri in the East, Rameshwaram in the South, one should visit Dwarika in the West. The pilgrimage of the whole of India, even on foot would be rendered meaningless if the pilgrim failed to visit Dwarika. At Dwarika, after taking a holy bath in the Gomti, the pilgrims used to have a seal printed on the arms and chest and then went for the darshan of Dwarikadhish (Lord Krishna’s *murti*). Only after this was the pilgrimage said to have been completed. The pilgrimage to Dwarika was very tough on account of the nuisance of robbers, *bawas* and *vairagis*. Besides this, the Gugli Brahmins used to

exploit the pilgrims because they would not give imprint the seal without getting gold from the pilgrims. Those who could not pay them were harassed. The members of the Dharamakul and Satchidanand Swami too had bitter experiences.

Therefore, while consecrating the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev at Vartal, Maharaj had said, “Here is Dwarikanath. This place shall be a *tirth* like Dwarika and here too people shall take a holy bath.”

Maharaj arrived in Vartal on Chaitra *sud* 7 for the Hari Navmi celebration. Devotees from different regions flocked to Vartal for the darshan of Maharaj. At that time the Dharu Lake was under construction. Half of the work was completed under the supervision of Aksharanand Swami. Maharaj had resolved to turn Vartal into an important place of pilgrimage like Dwarika.

The Ekadashi festival was celebrated with much fanfare. All the devotees had returned to their lodgings at the end of the discourses. At night they all had darshan of the holy Gomti river, Rukmani and Dwarikanath in a dream. In the morning, the devotees started talking about their dream to one another. All of them talked about it to Maharaj.

Maharaj told them, “Dwarikadhish has bestowed his divine favour upon everyone and he is on his way to Vartal with all his people. You should look upon Lakshmi-Narayan Dev as the form of Rukmani and Dwarikadhish. The Gomti also shall come and stay here. So let us finish the digging of the Dharu Lake as soon as possible. We should complete the work by Punam. We want consecrate the Gomti of Dwarika in this lake.”

All devotees joined the workers and Maharaj supervised them sitting on a chair at the site of the work. He, too, lifted baskets and encouraged the devotees. Devotees belonging to noble families also joined the workers. There were men and women, young and old, children and people of all communities helping to complete the work. By Punam (full moon) the mud was removed and the digging was almost finished. It was evening. Maharaj was standing on two bricks. He was giving blessings and *prasad* to men and women devotees who were digging the lake. Teja Bhakta and his fellow Harijan devotees of Chhani were the last to receive Maharaj’s blessings and *prasad*. They all fell at the feet of Maharaj. They had put in very hard labour. Maharaj affectionately asked them, “What shall I give you?” Their leader Vankar (Weaver) Teja Bhakta spoke on behalf his friends, “Maharaj, continue to bestow your divine favour upon us. We are very poor. Please give the bricks on which you are standing to us so that we can build a mandir and install them in it. We will also install your *murti* and worship and sing bhajans.”

“Granted,” said Maharaj and handed over the bricks to Teja Bhakta. He also gave the water container and the vessel which he was using.[2]

On the auspicious day of Chaitra *sud* Punam, Maharaj celebrated the Fuldol festival and sprinkled colours on the devotees. Then early in the morning on the day of first day of the dark half of the month, after performing *pujan*, He led a group of sadhus, *brahmacharis*, attendants and devotees and arrived on the bank of the lake singing bhajans. Maharaj asked Bhimbhai Pala, “Dig a little deeper at this spot. From here the

Gomti of Dwarika shall sprout."

Bhimbhai started digging according to the order of Maharaj. After giving just five blows with his pickaxe, a fountain of fresh cool water burst out. Many devotees beheld the darshan of mother Gomti appearing at Vartal and everyone became happy. There was now inexaustible water supply at this place of pilgrimage.

Maharaj observed, "Where there is Rukmani and Dwarikanath there is the Gomti. From today a pilgrimage to Vartal and a bath at this place shall be treated as a pilgrimage to Dwarika itself." They all became happy to hear this. Then Maharaj commanded Vaikunthanand Varni and Vasudevanand Varni to print a seal on the arm and chest of the devotees. He said to the daughter of Dada Dave, Jamuna, "You give the seal to women devotees." Thus everyone received the holy seal. By the time it was evening the lake was filled with water. Maharaj renamed Dharu Lake as Gomti Lake. Everyone took a holy bath in it and felt gratified.

Maharaj stayed here for some time, and then set out for Gadhada.

5. Mandirs in Kathiawad

As there were mandirs in Vartal, Ahmedabad and Kutch, the Kathi devotees assembled at Panchala and thought, "The devotees of Gujarat and Kutch are really lucky. Maharaj has built mandirs there, but has forgotten Kathiawad. Therefore let us go to Maharaj and ask him to explain." With these thoughts the Kathis came to Maharaj and talked about their problems and worries. They said to Maharaj, "Maharaj, how is it that you have built mandirs in Gujarat and Kutch and forgotten Kathiawad? Why is it so? Please construct a beautiful mandir in our region also."

Maharaj replied, "I am never away from you. I live in Gadhada, Loya and Panchala in Kathiawad most of the time. So, you get my darshan regularly, whereas the devotees in Gujarat and Kutch, get my darshan only occasionally when I go there to participate in the festivals. Therefore, to enable them to have the darshan of my *murti*, I have built mandirs in those regions. But as you have tremendous love and faith in me, I shall certainly build a beautiful mandir in Kathiawad."

First of all Maharaj chose a beautiful place on a hill near the river Ghela and resolved to build a mandir there. He called Harji Thakkar and decided the exact spot on which the mandir was to be constructed. But the land belonged to Jiva Khachar of Gadhada, who refused to give it to Maharaj. Maharaj was greatly disappointed and started looking for land in other towns. (On this very hill in Gadhada, Shastriji Maharaj later constructed a three-pinnacled marble mandir and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam.)

Maharaj started looking for appropriate land at Kariyani. Then he went to Vankiya, Kotda, Botad, Loya, Nagadka, Panchala, Jhinjavadar and Kundel and Kariyani, but could not find anywhere suitable to build a mandir.

From Kundel, Maharaj arrived in Sarangpur, where Jiva Khachar of Sarangpur accorded a grand reception to Maharaj. He requested Maharaj to select any piece of land in his *darbar* to build a mandir. Maharaj convened a meeting of all the devotees and residents of Sarangpur at the village common area and asked them to give their

consent. They all became very happy and said, “Maharaj, it will be a red letter day in the history of our village if you choose to build a mandir here. We will extend all possible help in the construction work. Therefore, please kindly decide to build a mandir here.” Jiva Khachar and the members of his family also requested Maharaj to build a mandir in Sarangpur. Maharaj then resolved to build a mandir in Sarangpur.

Maharaj said, “Whose permission do we need to get the stones?” Jiva Khachar replied, “Maharaj, we need the permission of a Jain Baniya of Barwala named Sheth Ghela Shah. He is very wise, considerate and generous.” After saying this much, Jiva Khachar went to Barwala and returned with Ghela Sheth. Maharaj asked Ghela Sheth, “Would you be happy, if we build a mandir here? Would you help us by giving stones?”

Sheth Ghela Shah replied with joy, “Maharaj, twenty-five villages are under my control. I am very happy that a mandir is being constructed in this village. I will not only supply the necessary stones but shall also put in your service as many carts as you need to bring them here.” Maharaj was very pleased with Ghela Sheth. He remarked, “Your name is *ghelo* (unwise) but you are indeed very wise.” Thus it was decided to build a mandir in Sarangpur.

In Gadhada, Dada Khachar, Jivuba and Laduba learnt about this. Dada Khachar accompanied by his family and certain devotees went to Sarangpur.

Dada Khachar and his sisters observed a fast – they stopped taking food and water. They started crying. They pleaded with Maharaj, “Maharaj, if you think we have done something wrong, please punish us with atonement or forgive our wrongs. But you had said, ’This Gadhada is mine and I am of Gadhada.’ Please honour your word and build a mandir in Gadhada, and continue to dwell there forever. We are prepared to sacrifice everything that we have.” When Maharaj heard these words, his eyes became wet with tears of love. Looking at Dada Khachar’s integrity, devotion and spirit of sacrifice, Maharaj, gladly gave his consent to build a mandir at Gadhada.

Maharaj was compelled by Dada Khachar’s love to agree to build a mandir at Gadhada. This made Jiva Khachar unhappy. He felt deeply hurt. When Maharaj heard about it, while consoling Jiva Khachar, he said, “Don’t be upset Jiva Khachar. This will be a glorious abode of God. Here at this place, we shall dwell with our *muktas* and our Dham which is known as Aksharbrahman, whose glory shall spread so fast that thousands of devotees shall visit this place for pilgrimage.”

These words consoled Jiva Khachar a little. With a heavy heart, he permitted Maharaj to go.[3]

Then Maharaj came to Gadhada from Sarangpur. Dada Khachar dedicated his *darbar* to Maharaj. He made a deed to that effect on a copper plate and handed over his whole property to Maharaj.

Then the rooms in which Panchuba was living and which were situated in the southern wing of the *darbar* were demolished. An astrologer was consulted to decide upon the auspicious day and hour *(muhurt*). On Saturday, Jyestha *sud* 11, Samvat 1881 (28 May 1825 ce), the foundation stone of a *shikharbaddh* mandir at Gadhada was laid by Maharaj. Funds were pledged by the devotees. Maharaj said, “I wish to give

everyone the chance to serve in building this mandir." Maharaj also instructed, "Every morning and evening, when the devotees go to the river Ghela, they should bring stones on their heads, for the foundation."

From that day, Maharaj whenever he was in Gadhada also used to bring a stone with him while returning from the river after taking his bath.

1. Even today, the descendents of Ardeshar Kotwal have preserved this divine memento.
2. The Harijans built a mandir in Chhani and installed all the three divine mementos there. They acquired a right to worship and perform *pujan* in the mandir. This was a radical revolutionary step in those days of rigid social customs.
3. On this spot, in Samvat 1972, Shastriji Maharaj constructed a three-pinnacled mandir and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam and the Dharmakul.

CHAPTER 25

1. Shudras Become Like Brahmins

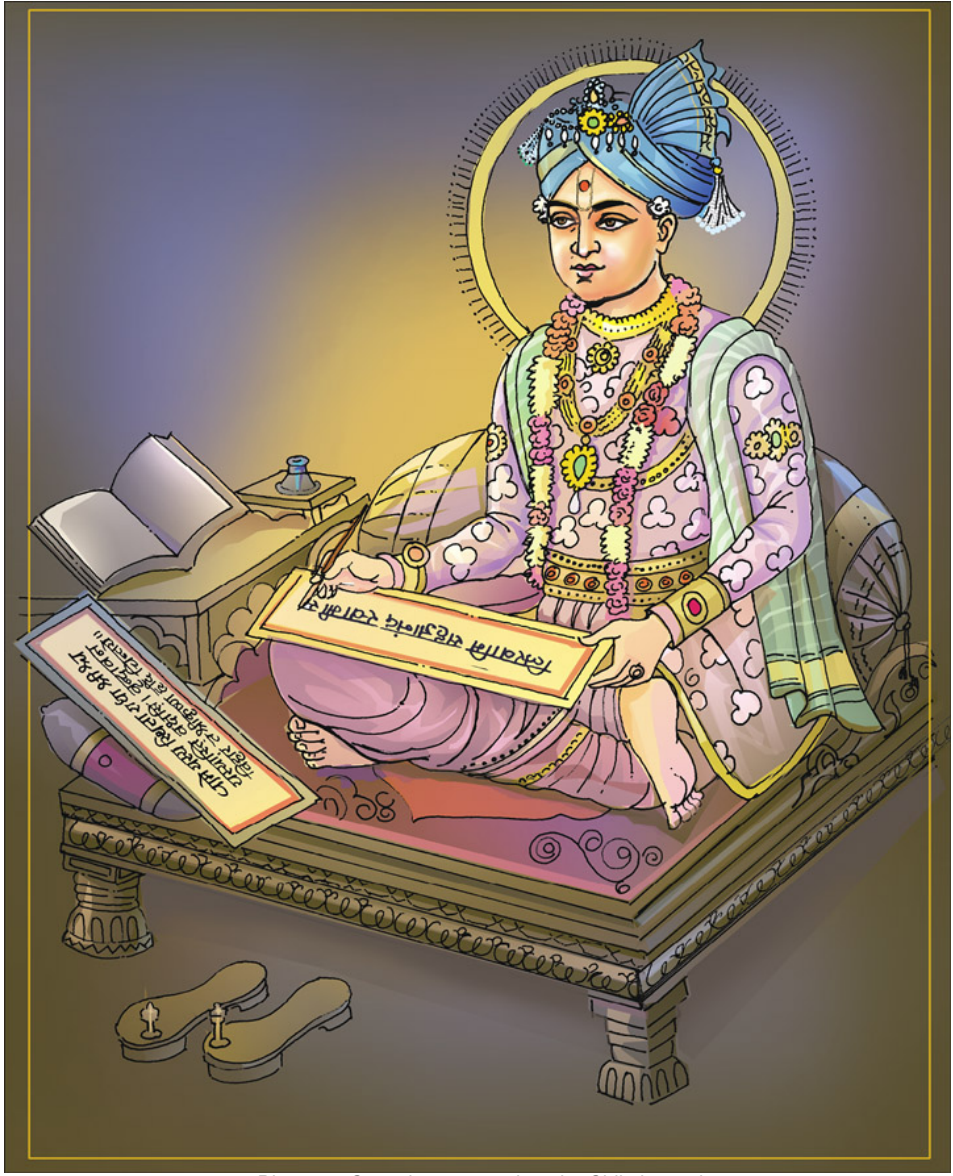
Maharaj celebrated the festival of Kartik Punam at Vartal. At that time Narupant Nana came there from Vadodara with an invitation for Maharaj from Maharaja Sayajirao II. Narupant Nana, who had come in person to fetch Maharaj, said to Muktanand Swami, "Last year when you spent the *chaturmas* at Vadodara, you were requested to bring Maharaj to Vadodara but you didn't fulfil our wishes. Therefore, I have come in person with a letter of invitation. Please ask Maharaj to grace Vadodara by paying a visit to our city." Maharaj accepted the invitation.

Maharaj started for Vadodara. On his way to Vadodara, when Maharaj reached Chhani, the devotees were waiting there to pay their respects. They requested Maharaj to oblige them by breaking his journey. Maharaj was offered a seat under a tree and then one after another all the devotees started falling at his feet and offered garlands to him.

It was under the influence of Gopalanand Swami that Tejabhai, a weaver, of Chhani had become a *satsangi*. Through him, in due course, Vankars and Harijans had become *satsangis*. They bathed daily, applied *tilak-chandlo*, performed personal puja, held discourses and sang devotional songs. They would not touch unworthy food, even from the houses of Brahmins or Banias. Therefore, some of the villagers used to ridicule Teja Bhakta and his companions. They used to pass funny remarks about Maharaj too. As Maharaj was to pass thrrough their village, the so-called upper class people like Brahmins, Banias and the *bawas* and sannyasis had declared, "Nobody belonging to the upper class should go for the darshan of Swaminarayan."

None of the Brahmins or Banias came for darshan. Only the Harijans and Vankars were there among the devotees. Maharaj sarcastically asked, "Isn't there any Brahmin or Bania in this village? Why haven't the Brahmins and Banias come?" Teja Bhakta narrated everything in detail. After listening to him Maharaj observed, "You shall attain the scholarship and culture of the Brahmins. Your actions will be so pure that even the Brahmins will appear small before you." Maharaj talked to the Harijans about good conduct and the power one gets by surrendering oneself to God. Then he went to Vadodara. And it so happened that these devotees of Chhani became such ideal devotees with pure thoughts and actions that the Brahmins felt inferior in their presence.

2. Birth of Shikshapatri



Bhagwan Swaminarayan writes the Shikshapatri

On Kartik *vad* 3, Maharaja Sayajirao II went upto Chhani to receive Maharaj. Maharaj was honoured on a seat atop a decorated elephant. Maharaj was taken out in a huge procession through the city, with much fanfare. In the procession there were companies of soldiers, cavalry, soldiers mounted on camels, elephants, drummers and trumpet players. The entire population of Vadodara had thronged the pavements, windows, balconies. Everywhere one looked there were people eager to have a glimpse of their God. At the end of the procession through the city Maharaj was received in the Devghar at Mastubaug. *Pujan* was performed of Maharaj's lotus feet. Then clothes and ornaments were offered to him.

Maharaj stayed here for three days, talked to Sayajirao and bestowed the choicest blessings on everyone before returning to Vartal.

From Kartik *vad* 11, Maharaj arranged Pragji Dave to recite the fifth, tenth and eleventh chapters of the Bhagvat every evening. During that period, every morning Maharaj would retire to Narayan Mahol and writing the Shikshapatri. It was completed on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchmi (Maha *sud* 5), Samvat 1882 (12 February 1826 ce). In the Shikshapatri, Maharaj wrote about ethics, principles, dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti, *upasana*, sadhus, *shastras*, duty and communion. He thus gave a code of conduct for all.

Maharaj came before the congregation with the Shikshapatri in hand. All the scholarly sadhus examined the Shikshapatri. Then Maharaj instructed Savitranand Swami and other scribes to make many copies of this book. Maharaj then gave each sadhu a copy. He sent one copy each to every town and village. Maharaj commanded all to read, listen to and perform *pujan* of Shikshapatri everyday.

3. Murti-Pratishtha at Dholera

The Vasant Panchmi festival was celebrated with great pomp in Vartal. On this occasion, devotees from Ahmedabad and Machhiyav simultaneously prayed, “O Maharaj! Please come to our place and celebrate the Fuldol festival.” Maharaj was helpless before their love so he said, “It will be done.”

Maharaj passed Dabhan and Memdavad and continued his journey. He duplicated his divine form and also that of the entire group and simultaneously reached Ahmedabad and Machhiyav. He celebrated Fuldol at both places simultaneously. He sprayed colours and fulfilled the wishes of the devotees. Then he left Machhiyav and caused his duplicate form to vanish. From Ahmedabad, he arrived at Kamaliya in the Bhal region and celebrated the Hari Navmi festival there. Adbhutanand Swami and Pujabhai from Dholera came there and prayed, “Maharaj! The Dholera mandir is almost ready. Please come and perform the *murti-pratishtha*. The rest of the work will be completed afterwards.”

Maharaj accepted their request and went to Dholera. In Dholera he consulted Narayan Joshi and fixed Vaishakh *sud* 13, Samvat 1882 (19 May 1826 ce) as the day for the auspicious ceremony. Invitation cards were sent to all towns and villages and all the devotees were invited to participate in the ceremony. Maharaj sent for the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna from Gadhada and consecrated them, renaming them as Madan-Mohan. The Brahmins were given *dakshina*.

On the next day, Nrusinh Chaudas, Maharaj observed a fast and then left for Gadhada.

CHAPTER 26

1. Appointment of the Mahants

In Samvat 1883, Maharaj celebrated the Prabodhini Ekadashi festival in Vartal. Then Maharaj went to Gadhada. One day, during the assembly, the devotees garlanded Maharaj. Maharaj then asked them to become quiet and said, "We have to appoint Mahants for the mandirs that we have built. The Mahant will work with a sense of belonging. We have decided to appoint separate Mahants for each mandir. We are just informing you about this." Then he continued, "Aksharanand Swami shall be the Mahant of Vartal, the Mahant of Bhuj mandir will be Vaishnavanand Swami, Gadhada mandir will be under Viraktanand Swami, the mandir at Ahmedabad will be under the care of Sarvagnanand Swami and the Mahant of Dholera shall be Adbhutanand Swami." With these words all these *sadgurus* were garlanded and honoured as the Mahants.

Brahmanand Swami said, "Maharaj, before you appoint a Mahant at Junagadh we must consider many things, because the detractors are very powerful there. We should appoint such a Mahant there so that there will not be need for a replacement."

Maharaj replied, "Swami! We will appoint such a sadhu as Mahant at Junagadh so that there would be no need for any replacement."

After some time, at the time of the Chaitra Punam festival at Vartal, Maharaj announced in the assembly, "Today we are going to appoint the Mahant of Junagadh. Call Nirgunanand of Bhadra." So Gunatitanand Swami entered the assembly. Maharaj got up and removed the garland from his neck and garlanded Gunatitanand Swami saying, "This is our Mahant of Junagadh." Then Maharaj gave him his own dress and *pagh* and blessed him.

2. Our Akshardham

Then Maharaj turned to Kurji Dave who was sitting in the assembly and said, "Do you remember that when Ramanand Swami had arrived in Piplana from Bhuj, you had come with the message to Loj. At that time everyone had given you something as gift, but I had told you that I had nothing to give at that time but I would give my Akshardham to you. Look, here it is. This Gunatitanand Swami is my Akshardham. I am giving him as a gift to all our devotees from Sorath."

Then Gunatitanand Swami asked Maharaj whether he should keep five or twenty-five sadhus at Junagadh. But ultimately it was decided to keep two hundred sadhus at Junagadh. Maharaj then addressed the devotees of Sorath, "I have given everything to the devotees of Sorath. Therefore, to whoever serves Gunatitanand Swami with sincerity shall be purified of the burdens of not just past hundred births but of a thousand births."

The devotees from Sorath and Junagadh became very happy to here this.

3. Never Disobey the Shikshapatri

Maharaj went to Barvala. One of the beloved devotees invited Maharaj to his house. But as his own house very small he made arrangements for Maharaj's stay in the bigger house of his elder brother. He made a bed for Maharaj and said, "Maharaj, please be comfortable. I will be back soon. I am going to the bazaar to buy some foodstuff for you. Then I will request some *brahmachari* to cook food for you. That food will be served to you." Maharaj replied, "That's fine."

The devotee went to buy foodstuff. He was delayed in the bazaar. Meanwhile, his elder brother who had no respect towards Maharaj, and who hated the sadhus, entered the house. He shouted at Maharaj, "Who are you? With whose permission have you entered my house?"

Maharaj asked him not to lose patience and explained everything to him. But he would not listen to him. He continued, "This is my house. Without my permission not only my younger brother, but even my wife cannot entertain anyone in this house. Please quit this house."

"Don't worry, we are leaving." With these words Maharaj, the sadhus and the devotees went out of the house. Maharaj remarked, "Let us go to Navda. We have disobeyed the Shikshapatri written by us, therefore we suffered. So kindly never disobey the Shikshapatri (*shloka* 33)." This incident revealed the importance of the Shikshapatri. When Maharaj reached the outskirts of Barvala the devotee came there with the foodstuff. He learnt about the ugly incident and prayed to Maharaj to forgive him. He laid the foodstuff at the feet of Maharaj. Maharaj pardoned him and commanded him to obey the Shikshapatri before leaving for Navda.

CHAPTER 27

1. Offered Shoes to the Sadhus

Maharaj left to go to Vartal to grace the Hari Navmi celebration. Maharaj halted with the group of sdhus and devotees for afternoon rest on the outskirts of Bhelad. Those were the hot days of Chaitra. The sadhus soaked their *gatariyas* in a nearby well and brought water in their gourds and sprinkled it on the earth to cool it. Then they tied down their *gatariyas* on all the four sides under a tree and made an improvised tent. Now it was cool and shady. A mattress was spread inside and Maharaj went in for a siesta.

As he was lying on his bed, Maharaj thought, "The sadhus are travelling barefooted in the hot sun and some of them have blisters as a result. It must be causing pain to their feet." He was deeply concerned about it. When it was evening, Maharaj woke up and told the sadhus, "It is my command that from today you shall all wear shoes." Thus he ordered the sadhus to wear shoes and resumed his journey.

They arrived near the mandir of Buta-devi on their way to Varna. There, under a *varakhada* tree, Maharaj convened a gathering. He said to Jorabhai, "Give me something to eat." Jorabhai replied, "We have two pounds of sugar crystals given by the wife of Gadhvi Khimraj of Kamiyala. I can give them to you if you want them." Maharaj replied, "Give me the sugar crystals." Maharaj opened the small bundle of sugar and gave a handful to Sura Khachar. Sura Khachar wanted to see the power of Maharaj so he jocularly said, "Please give a handful of sugar to each and every member of the group." Maharaj replied, "Sure," and gave a handful of sugar to all the members of the group. He too also partook of it yet the original stock had remained intact.

2. Murti-Pratishtha in Junagadh

Maharaj arrived at Vartal. He celebrated the Hari Navmi festival with much fanfare. After bestowing his divine blessings upon the devotees of Gujarat, Maharaj returned to Gadhada. He asked the devotees to complete the mandir in Gadhada as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the mandir at Junagadh was ready. The day of the *murti-pratishtha* was fixed for Thursday, Vaishakh *vad* 2, Samvat 1884 (1 May 1828 ce). In true Vedic tradition, Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Ranchhod-Trikam, Radha-Raman Dev and Shiddheshwar Mahadev with much pomp. On this occasion, the Nawab of Junagadh said to Maharaj, "Maharaj! When you have built such a big mandir here, either you or an equally great fakir should stay here." Maharaj replied, "I will stay here in the form of this Sadhu. This Sadhu is as great as I. Therefore, do seek his darshan, *seva* and communion." With these words he introduced Gunatitanand Swami to the Nawab.

3. Swaminarayaniya

One after another, Swaminarayan mandirs were being built. The sadhus at these mandirs had to work under the *mahants*. Vartal was known to be the place of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev and Ahmedabad was called the place of Nar-Narayan Dev. Thus all the mandirs were named after the chief deities in the respective mandirs. On account of this, once again, the sadhus started to be called after the names of the mandirs where they lived. As a result they used to refer to one another as Vasudeviya, Nar-Narayaniya, Lakshmi-Narayaniya and so on. Thus new groupings of sadhus were formed.

Maharaj learned about this. Once, at the time of a festival, he invited all the sadhus and said, "Those who are Vasudeviya please sit here, the Nar-Narayaniya should sit there, those who are Lakshmi-Narayaniya should occupy these seats," and thus allocated them separate seats. Then at the end he said, "Now if any 'Swaminarayaniyas' remain, they should come and sit near me." All those sadhus who were proud of their different labels and groups felt ashamed and apologized and stopped indulging into such separatist activities. They all decided to keep Shriji Maharaj at the centre of all their activities.

CHAPTER 28

1. Murti-Pratishtha in Gadhada

For the mandir in Gadhada Maharaj had said, “Prepare a *murti* that resembles me.” So Narayanjibhai said, “Maharaj! If you sit in person before me then a *murti* of the correct size and form can be made.”

Maharaj agreed. He would sit in the light on a cot in the veranda to the east of the Vasudev-Narayan room. Narayanjibhai would look at Maharaj and sculpt the stone to give the proper form to the *murti*. Often, Maharaj would show his pleasure on Narayanjibhai and give him his as *prasad*.

Those were the holy days of *chaturmas*. The mandir in Gadhada was ready. Maharaj was dwelling in Gadhada. Maharaj celebrated the Janmashtmi festival.

The month of Bhadarvo began. Maharaj was addressing a holy assembly in a room situated to the north of the room of Vasudev-Narayan. Nishkulanand Swami came there, fell at his feet and said, “Maharaj, the mandir is ready. The *murtis* are also ready. So, the sooner we install the *murtis* the better it will be.” Maharaj consulted Gopalanand Swami regarding the auspicious day and hour for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. Gopalanand Swami replied, “Maharaj, Aso *sud* 12 is the most suitable and auspicious day for the installation of the *murtis*.” Maharaj agreed to his suggestion and sent invitation cards to the devotees in different towns and villages. He invited the Vedic scholars from Umreth.

On Aso *sud* 12, Samvat 1885 (9 October 1829 ce), according to Vedic traditions, Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Gopinathji Maharaj and Radhikaji in the mandir in Gadhada. He asked the devotees to see him in the *murti* of Gopinathji and said to Dada Khachar, “I am dwelling in these *murtis*. While living in this *murti*, I shall accept your service.” With these words, Maharaj embraced the *murti* and touched its head with both his hands.

In the western sanctuary, the *murtis* of Dharma-Bhakti were installed and in the eastern sanctuary, the *murtis* of the Surya, Krishna, Baldev and Revtiji were installed.

Dada Khachar’s dream of building a mandir had become a reality.

2. Reception in Bhavnagar

After celebrating Fuldol at Vartal, Maharaj began his tour and visited Kariyani, Rohishala, Vartej and at last reached Bhavnagar. The devotees of Bhavnagar accorded a very warm reception to Maharaj. Maharaj visited the houses of all the devotees. In the evening, when Maharaj was conducting the assembly, Atmaram Darji arrived from Surat. He presented Maharaj a beautiful *dagli* intricately decorated with *butta* and other detailed decorative patterns. Maharaj praised the workmanship and showed it to the devotees. They were all impressed by the art of the tailor.

The entire town started talking about the beautiful *dagli*. The Maharaja of Bhavnagar also heard people praising the tailor's art. He asked one of the devotees to get him that *dagli* as he was interested in getting one prepared for himself. He showed the coat to the tailors of Bhavnagar and said, "If anyone can make a *dagli* like this, I will give him one hundred gold *mahors*."

But all the tailors unanimously admitted, "We are not capable of doing such beautiful, delicate and minute embroidary work." The Maharaja sent his attendant and invited Atmaram Darji to his court. He said to Atmaram, "If you can make such a beautiful *dagli* for me, I will pay you whatever you demand."

Atmaram replied, "Maharaja Saheb, this *dagli* is the result of many days' labour. The stitches are the tokens of my affection and I have received the highest reward – Akshardham. I could succeed in making such a *dagli* only because of Maharaj's blessings and inspiration and my unfathomable love for him. I don't think I can make another one such as this." Maharaja Vajesinhji understood the real meaning and returned the *dagli* to Maharaj through a devotee. He was very sad that he could not get a similar *dagli*.

The next day Maharaja Vajesinhji received Shriji Maharaj in his palace. Vajesinhji garlanded Maharaj and performed his *pujan*. Maharaj said to the king, "We have built a mandir and consecrated the *murti* of Gopinath Dev at Gadhada, which is under Bhavnagar. Please see to it that the state co-operates in such religious activities and no problems are created by anybody when we build such mandirs at different places."

Maharaja Vajesinh was very wise and polite. He said to Maharaj, "Maharaj, it is because of your blessings and mercy that I am ruling over Bhavnagar. My state is prosperous by your grace. Therefore, by constructing mandirs in the towns and villages of my state, you are increasing the prestige and wealth of my state. I will issue a written statement today." Then he called his Minister and dictated the statement, "Whenever Bhagwan Swaminarayan builds mandirs in our state, no citizen should create any problem or obstruct the construction work. The people should co-operate with him, and the State also shall extend all possible help." He put his signature and seal on that document and put it at the feet of Maharaj. Maharaj blessed him. Vajesinhji Maharaja escorted Maharaj upto the palace gate. Maharaj then left for Gadhada.

3. Imbibe Virtues

Once at noon, Maharaj was serving food to the sadhus. He was serving a variety of separate dishes to the sadhus and devotees. When everyone was about to begin eating, after saying '*Jai*', a sadhu arrived there from his tour of villages. Maharaj had exhausted everything. Now what could he do? Maharaj said to the sadhu, "You hold out your *pattar* and start collecting food from everyone as *bhiksha*." The *paramhansa* took his *pattar* and started moving amongst those who were sitting there. Everyone gave the best of the dishes to him. In no time his *pattar* was filled with sweets. Maharaj stood between the two rows holding the saint's *pattar* and said, "Look here, he bowed down before everyone and collected the food, and as a result, the whole of the *pattar*

has been filled with sweets. In the same manner, if you can overcome your ego and collect just one virtue from everyone, your life will be filled with virtues."

CHAPTER 29

1. Had His Own Murti Drawn

It was the Samvat Year 1886. Maharaj spent *chaturmas* in Gadhada. After celebrating the Annakut, Maharaj went to Sarangpur. He stayed there for one night and reached Khasta via Sunderiyana and Dhandhuka. He spent the night on the river bank. It was a dark and dead night. A tiger approached them stealthily. When it was hardly at a distance of twenty steps, it growled fiercely. Bhaguji lifted his gun. But Maharaj got up from his bed and thundered at the tiger. It was a cosmos-splitting voice. The tiger became nervous and speedily retreated.

Next day, Maharaj visited Kamaliya, Varad, Sinjiwada and reached Vartal. Here he celebrated the Prabodhini Ekadashi festival. Next day, in the assembly he said to Narayanji Suthar of Junagadh, "Your mind is fixed on my *murti*. Please draw my *murti* so that the sadhus and devotees can easily remember and worship it." "This *murti*," Narayanji Suthar replied, "will be drawn. The work shall be accomplished by your grace. I will prepare your *murti* in a metallic mould and shall bring it to Gadhada on Ram Navmi." Maharaj was pleased to hear this. But nobody got the meaning of this forecast.

2. Meeting with Governor Malcolm

Meeting between Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Governor Sir John Malcolm, Rajkot

From Posh *sud* 2, Samvat 1886 Maharaj became ill. He withdrew from everything. He reduced the intake of food and water and his body gradually became thinner and thinner. The devotees were greatly worried about Maharaj's deteriorating health. Maharaj stopped moving away from Gadhada. He stayed within the four walls of the Akshar Ordi. Maharaj was constantly attended by a group of thirty sadhus day and night. Besides these sadhus, Maharaj was very well looked after by great devotees like Bhaguji, Mulji, Sura Khachar and others.

In those days, Sir William Bentinck was the Governor-General of India and Sir John Malcolm was the Governor of Bombay Province. Sir Malcolm was to visit Kathiawad. He had learnt about Maharaj's greatness from Bishop Heber and other British officials. He knew about the social and religious reforms brought about by Maharaj and was very eager to see Maharaj.

It was the month of Maha. The Secretary to the Governor Malcolm wrote a letter to Maharaj, expressing the Governor's desire to meet him. Maharaj was not in good health, so he replied to the Secretary's letter on Maha *vad* 13 stating that due to ill health it was not possible for him to arrage the meeting. The Secretary to the Governor, Mr Thomas Williamson, wrote back to Maharaj and expressed his good wishes for Maharaj's speedy recovery.

The month of Fagun began. On 22 February 1830, Mr Blane, the officiating Political Agent of Kathiawad, sent a letter of invitation to Maharaj. He wrote, "The Governor and his party have come to Kathiawad. It is his sincere wish that if it is possible he should like to meet you at Rajkot. Will you please kindly let me know whether your kind self will be able to make a trip to Rajkot?"

Maharaj was impressed by the sincerity and affection of Mr Blane and the Governor, so he put aside his illness and with great yogic powers regained health. Maharaj gave his consent to the messenger. On the third day, Maharaj travelled in a *mena* from Gadhada to Rajkot. He was accompanied by a group of sadhus and devotees.

On the morning of Fagun *sud* 5, Samvat 1886 (26 February 1830), a meeting between Maharaj and the Governor Sir John Malcolm was held at the Political Agent Mr Blane's bungalow situated on Diwan Road. It was a meeting between state and spiritual authorities. The meeting was attended by the Governor Sir Malcolm, his Secretary, Mr Thomas Williamson, the Political Agent, Mr Blane and three other officials. Maharaj was accompanied by Mukund Brahmachari, Shukanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Dada Khachar, Ladha Thakkar, Hirji Thakkar, Deva Bhagat and Bhimbhai.

Maharaj was received with a gunfire salute and music played by the band. The soldiers and sepoys presented a guard of honour to Maharaj. When Maharaj arrived at the bungalow, the Governor came towards Maharaj and shook hands with him. Then with folded hands he received him and escorted him to the drawing room. Then he garlanded Maharaj, sprinkled scent, offered shawls and requested him to take his seat. Then the Governor asked Maharaj to explain to him the principles of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. He inquired, "I hope you don't face any obstruction in your religious activities in our regime?" Maharaj replied, "Not much, but please protect the

cow and Brahmins. Your rule shall last for a long period." Then the Governor said to him, "Our government has decided to ban the *sati* custom and infanticide. What is your opinion on these issues?" Maharaj replied, "One should never commit suicide. After the death of one's husband one should accept the Lord as a husband, but never to commit suicide. Also, one can never be allowed to commit infanticide."

The Governor was pleased to hear this. He said, "Narayan Swami, you have given very precious advice." The Governor requested Maharaj to give him a book explaining the principles of the Swami- narayan Sampraday and said, "Please protect us and our opponents." Maharaj very happily blessed him and gave him a copy of the Shikshapatri.

At the end of their meeting they parted happily. The Governor and the officials raised their hats and saluted Maharaj. The Governor and the officers walked up to the gates and saw Maharaj off. Maharaj returned to his lodge. He took his lunch and started from Rajkot to go Gadhada. After his arrival at Gadhada, within five to seven days, Maharaj once again became ill.

3. Last Illness

Fagun *sud* Punam had passed. This time, Maharaj did not go to Vartal to celebrate Holi. The devotees there did not enjoy the festival in the absence of Maharaj. At the end of the festival, instead of returning to their respective places, the sadhus and devotees went to Gadhada for the darshan of Maharaj. Maharaj received them all with love. He sent Mukundanand Varni to call Muktanand Swami, Rampratapbhai, Gopalanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Shukanand Swami Nishkulanand Swami, Anandanand Swami, Paramchaitanyanand Swami, Bhai Atmanand Swami and many other sadhus. He also called Akhandanand, Vasudevanand, Vaishnavanand and other *brahmacharis*. Bhaguji, Mulji, Ratan Mulji and other *parshads* were also called.

Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Jiva Khachar and many other Darbars were also sent for. Dinanath Bhatt, Mayaram Bhatt, Bechar Bhatt, Tulsi Dave, Pragji Dave and other great Brahmins, too, were called there. Ladha Thakkar, Hirji Thakkar, Punja Sheth, Thakkarji, Lavji Sheth, Bhagha Sheth, and many other businessmen were sent for. He also called Jivuba, Laduba, Raiba and other women devotees. The assembly hall was filled to capacity.

Maharaj said, "You all recognize me as Parabrahman Parameshwar. You are all trying to please me. Therefore, listen to what I am saying. By my own will, I attained the human form on this earth. I have finished all my work. I have founded the pure Sampraday, built mandirs, written shastras and initiated sadhus. My dream has been realized and nothing interests me anymore. It is my earnest desire to return to my heavenly abode. This body is subject to death and decay; therefore, I have decided to return to Akshardham."

When the devotees heard this, they felt as if a bolt had come down upon them from the blue. Most of them had started shaking with sorrow. At the idea of Maharaj's return to Dham, some of them fainted, and some started openly shedding tears.

Maharaj bestowed upon them his divine mercy. He inspired them and consoled them. He smiled at them and won their hearts. He put them all in a good mood by utterring words of warmth and consolation. But in his own mind, he had firmly resolved to return to Dham.

4. Vows Taken

Now Maharaj was firmly resolved to go to Dham. He would not take any food or water. Under great pressure, at times, he would accept porridge of millet, or rice, or *rotla*. Now he looked as thin as he appeared when he came in the form of Nilkanth Varni from the forests. Bhai Atmanand Swami approached Maharaj and said, "Why are you staging this drama of death. Eat, drink and be merry and make us happy too. If you are returning to Dham, then we too, shall die and follow you. Just as, long ago, when a Brahmin guru named Pitamber died, his 27 disciples also climbed upon the funeral pyre and died. In the same manner, we too shall die after you. You will be followed by rivers of blood. Therefore, give up your idea of returning to Dham."

Maharaj replied, "If I am the supreme divine God, then I will see to it, that not a drop of blood is shed. Even if his hour has come I would extend it and lengthen his life."

Maharaj paused for a while and then said, "Nobody should die after me. Nobody should commit suicide by swallowing poison or strangling himself. Whoever commits suicide will not attain my Dham and will be guilty of maligning the guru and disobeying my *agna*. Whoever has resolved to die after me should hold my feet and take a vow that he will not die after me."

With these words, he made the sadhus and devotees hold his feet and take a vow accordingly.

Once, Maharaj came and sat in the Sukh Shaiya in the mandir. He called the senior sadhus and devotees to sit nearby. He instructed the sadhus and devotees to remain under the command of Gopalanand Swami. He instructed him to look after the entire Satsang. He also commanded everyone to go to Junagadh for one month every year and associate with Gunatitanand Swami.

Then Maharaj added, "Install the *murtis* of Dharma, Bhakti, Harikrishna in the mandirs I have built. Build mandirs in Surat, Dholka, Khambhat, Muli and other places and install the *murtis* I have given. Nityanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami – you help in the building of the mandirs.All sadhus and devotees obey the commands of Sadguru Gopalanand Swami." Having given these instructions, Maharaj returned to the Akshar Ordi and rested.

Maharaj's condition was deteriorating. He was performing the functions of the body through yogic and divine powers. One day he sent for Brahmanand Swami and said, "You go to Junagadh and send Nirgunanand Swami of Bhadra." Brahmanand Swami understood the meaning. He was helpless. Going was a must. He took the companion sadhus with him and left for Junagadh. Before leaving, with heavy heart, he told the sadhus, "Fill your heart fully with the darshan of Maharaj because you will not be able to see him again." The sadhus saw Maharaj till they were satisfied. After travelling for

some time, some deer crossed their path. It was a bad omen. Brahmanand Swami grew apprehensive. He said, “Maharaj will certainly leave his corporeal body. I feel like returning. But I have to carry out the commands. So those who want to have darshan may again return. I am proceeding further. Those who want to stay may do so.” Some of the sadhus who were accompanying him went for darshan and came back. But Brahmanand Swami with heavy load on his heart continued the journey. On the day of fourth day early in the morning, Brahmanand Swami arrived at Junagadh.

5. “I Want to Regain Health!”

Maharaj was feeling terribly lonely without Brahmanand Swami. He could cheer him up and force him to eat a little. But now who else could do that? The next morning Maharaj didn’t wake up. He had covered himself with a bed sheet from head to toe. He had not taken any food the previous night. Nityanand Swami approached Maharaj with a bowl of millet porridge and tried to wake him up. He called him aloud twice or thrice but Maharaj would not even stir.

Therefore, Nityanand Swami dashed the bowl on the floor and started crying. Maharaj threw the cover off and got up and said, “Why are you all crying? Is someone dead?”

Nityanand replied, “Wouldn’t it pain us if you remain sad and won’t take any food?”

Maharaj showered mercy and said, “Alright go and get some hot water. I want to take bath. I’ll take lunch because I want to regain health today.” Then Maharaj took a hot water bath, donned white clothes, became cheerful and took the lunch prepared and brought by the *brahmachari*. In the evening He attended the assembly. Drums were beaten, bells rang and Dada Khachar distributed sweets. Everyone became cheerful again. But it was night again! Maharaj, once again assumed ill health, became sad and withdrew from everything. Once again the sadhus and devotees became sad and apprehensive.

6. Darshan to Kakabhai

Illness and fever in the body of Maharaj were increasing. The devotees were miserable. The devotees from Gujarat, Kathiawad, Kutch, Rajasthan, Khandesh and other places started calling on Maharaj.

Kakabhai, who lived in the village of Rojka had become very old. He, too, was seriously ill and he thought that he would not last long. Therefore, he sent a pedigree mare and a plate of silver to Maharaj at Gadhada. He sent a letter to Maharaj with his attendant, who took the horse. He had written in the letter, “O My Lifeforce! O Bhaktavatsal Bhagwan! If it is possible for you, please bless me by giving me your last darshan. If it is not possible for you to come in person, then please do come to receive me at the time of my end. Please be merciful to this devotee.”

Kakabhai’s servant went to Gadhada with this letter. He bowed and offered prostrations, and presented the mare and the plate of silver to Maharaj. Maharaj asked somebody to read the letter and noted the contents. Maharaj thought, “Kakabhai loves

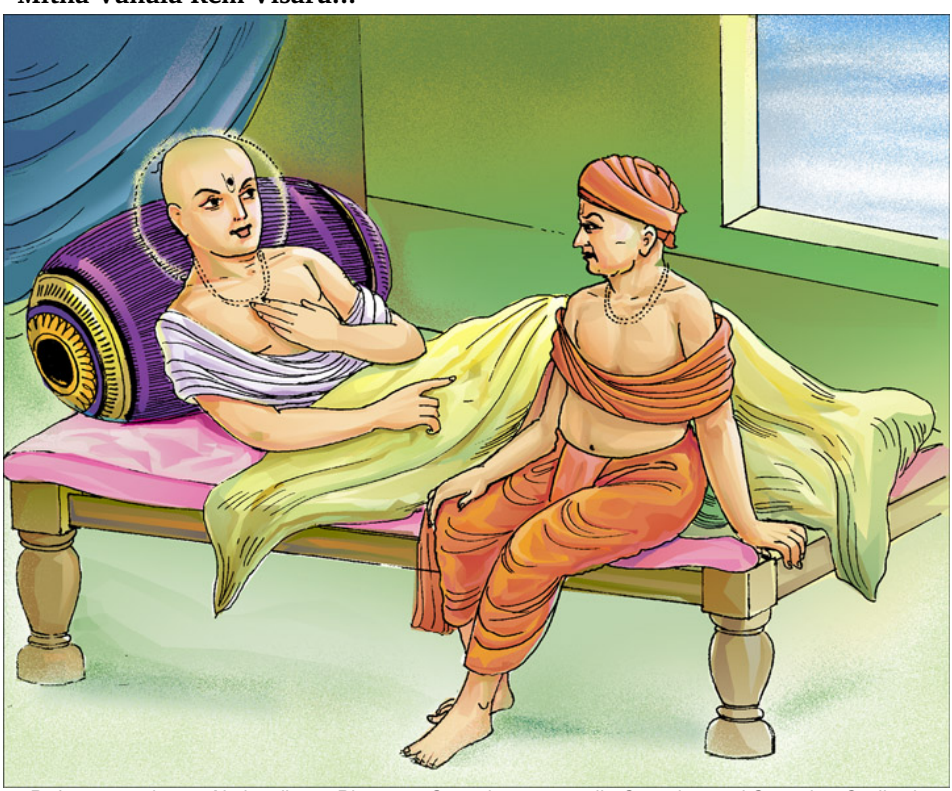
me immensely. His request is sincere, and if we can put aside this illness for some days and go to Rojka village, the devotee will feel better." With this thought Maharaj said, "Now we are fit and we want to go to Rojka." Then from Gadhada Maharaj went to Rojka in a *mena*, and he was accompanied by many sadhus and devotees. He gave darshan to Kakabhai and tears of joy started flowing down from the eyes of Kakabhai. Maharaj stayed there for two days, and was very well looked after by the members of Kakabhai's family.

Maharaj said, "Now we are returning to Gadhada," and so Kakabhai said, "Maharaj, this body of bones and flesh appears to me like hell. Please relieve me and take me to your Dham." Maharaj said, "Don't worry, within a few days, you shall be attaining the Akshardham.

Maharaj pleased Kakabhai. Kakabhai asked his wife to remove her bangles and offered them to Maharaj saying, "Please spend this on feeding the sadhus and *parshads*." Maharaj left for Gadhpur. All the devotees became very happy to see Maharaj living a normal life.

Kakabhai passed away to Dham. After his return from Rojka, Maharaj remained normal for some five to six days and once again fell ill.

7. "Mitha Vahala Kem Visaru..."



Before returning to Akshardham, Bhagwan Swaminarayan calls Gunatitanand Swami to Gadhada

It was Jeth *sud* 4. Gunatitanand Swami was performing *pradakshina* in Junagadh

mandir. Suddenly some portion of the *shikhar* fell and came down near his feet. It was a bad omen. He had misgivings in his mind. He was convinced that some misfortune was awaiting them all. When he was brooding like this, Brahmanand Swami entered. He gave a detailed report on Maharaj's health to Swami. He said, "You must immediately go to Gadhada. Maharaj wants to see you. He is awaiting your arrival there." Immediately, Swami collected his *potlu* and left for Gadhada with his companion sadhus. He was walking, rather running, as fast as wind. He covered more than sixty miles in a day and reached Gadhada on Jeth *sud* 6.

Gunatitanand Swami rushed directly to the Akshar Ordi. Sura Khachar went inside and informed Maharaj, "Gunatitanand Swami has arrived." No sooner did Maharaj hear his name, than he sprang up on his bed and said, "Has Swami come? Send him here."

Sura Khachar went out and directed Swami to Maharaj. Swami offered respects with prostration. Maharaj embraced him while remaining form his bed. Then Swami sat at the feet of Maharaj on the bed, as intimated by Maharaj. Maharaj radiated his divine love towards Swami. Then, after a pause he sang:

"Mithā vhālā kem visaru māru, tamthi bāndhel tan ho;
Tarsyāne jem pānidu vahālu, bhukhyāne bhojan ho."

"How can I forget you my beloved when you are a part of my existence, my consciousness? The way the thirsty long for water and the starving for food, I long for you…"

Then with a view to allow Maharaj to take rest, Swami took leave. Once again Maharaj covered himself and fell asleep. Now Maharaj would take some food from the *thal* of *shira-puri* and give the rest to Gunatitanand Swami. Hope returned and people relaxed a bit.

8. Returned to Dham

The sun was shining brightly on Jeth *sud* 10, Samvat 1886 (1 June 1830 CE). Mukund Varni gave Maharaj a bath. Then he accepted some food to please the devotees. He came out of the Akshar Ordi and gave darshan to the dear ones. Then he called Gopalanand Swami first and expressed his desire to return to Dham.

Then he called Gunatitanand Swami in private and said, "Swami! I no more wish to live here in this world. You continue to spread the glory and significance of my form. Do explain to the people the distinction between avatar and *avatari*. Give happiness to the *satsangis* and bestow upon them divine bliss. As the devotees from Sorath region couldn't get my manifest bliss, now I shall give it to them through you." With these words, Maharaj once again withdrew all his focus from everything. He expressed his desire to have some rest.

It was noon. Maharaj asked for a low stool. Mukund Varni set the stool. Maharaj sat on the stool to meditate in a lotus posture. Then he once again withdrew all his senses and suddenly left the corporeal body independently. Soon the sadhus and devotees received the news of Maharaj's departure for Dham. They felt the heavens falling apart. All the sadhus, men and women devotees started crying bitterly. Gopalanand Swami consoled them.

Then the devotees and sadhus bathed Maharaj with the holy waters of the Unmat Ganga (River Ghela). Then he was dressed in a white *pitamber,* white garments, white *shelu* and white *pagh*. Then He was garlanded and was given ornaments, and *arti* and *pujan* was performed. A *tilak* of *kesar chandan* with a *kumkum chandlo* at the centre was applied to his forehead. Then he was placed in a *palkhi* and was brought to Lakshmi Vadi (the place where there is a mandir now), with everyone singing bhajans and spraying *abil* and *gulal.* Along the way people showered flowers and coins. The funeral pyre was made of sandalwood. The last rites were performed according to scriptural tradition, with chanting of the mantras by Brahmins and *shrifal*, *ghee*, *jav*, *tal,* etc., were offered to the fire that consumed the mortal remains of Maharaj.

9. I Am Constantly There in Your Heart

The flames were leaping towards the sky and everyone felt the vacuum created by Maharaj's departure to Dham. They were all stupefied. Dada Khachar was thinking, "Now who would bestow divine bliss upon us?" He burst into tears and started sobbing. Everyone tried to console him but he would not become quiet. Then Gopalanand Swami approached him and said, "If you break down like this, everyone will break down. You go where Maharaj used to sit."

As soon as he reached the *bethak* he witnessed a miracle. He saw Maharaj addressing the congregation. He had donned a garland of roses and was talking to the devotees. Maharaj consoled Dada Khachar and said, "Why are you crying? I will continue to give you my darshan." With these words, he took off the garland from his neck and gave it to Dada Khachar.

The last rites were over. The darkness was lengthening its shadow and Gunatitanand Swami was returning from Lakshmi Vadi. He had a *tumbdi* in his hand. He saw green grass near the water and thought, "Water is the life of this grass and that's why it is fresh, green and cheerful. But our life, Maharaj, has left us." At this very thought he fainted there and his *tumbdi* rolled away from him.

Soon Maharaj appeared in a divine form. He held Swami by the hand and revived him from the swoon. Then he said, "What is this? Where have I gone? I am constantly dwelling in you." Maharaj repeated this promise thrice and once again convinced him about his manifestation on earth through his God-realized Sadhu and disappeared.

Shriji Maharaj's Stay on This Earth

	Months
1	31 Chaitra *sud* 9, Samvat 1837 to Ashadh *sud* 10, Samvat 1849: with Dharmadev and Bhaktimata in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya
2	21 Ashadh *sud* 10, Samvat 1849 to Shravan *vad* 6, Samvat 1856: Journey throughtout India; austerities and forest life
3	10 Shravan *vad* 6, Samvat 1856 to Jeth *vad* 12, Samvat 1857: in Loj with Muktanand Swami
4	6 Jeth *vad* 12, Samvat 1857 to Maghshar *sud* 13, Samvat 1858: with Ramanand Swami

27	Maghshar *sud* 13, Samvat 1858 to Jeth *sud* 10, Samvat 1886: moved about in the Satsang and founded the Swaminarayan Sampradaya
70	**Total stay on this earth**

Glossary

A

abil white powder used during worship rituals

acharya head of a diocese

adharma unrighteousness

agna instruction, order, command

ahimsa non injury, in mind, action and speech

aja goat; unborn

Aksharbrahman second-highest of the five eternal entities, i.e., transcends everything except Parabrahman

angarkhu long, sewn upper garment worn by males, similar to a long waistcoat stretching down to the knees

anirdesh undefinable

antahkaran inner seat of thought and feelings

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the murti of God as an act of worship

ashram hermitage; dwelling of ascetics

asuri demoniac

atmarup one who has realized one's true self as atma

atyantik kalyan final liberation

atyantik mukti ultimate salvation

avatari the supreme avatar, the highest incarnation of God

avidya synonymous with maya. False understanding of the nature of reality. Ignorance

B

baba mendicant

bajro millet

barfi a sweet delicacy

bawa mendicant

bethak seat; gathering

bhagwati diksha initiation into the sadhu-fold

Bhairav a form of Shiv

Bhavani goddess Parvati

bhiksha to beg for alms

brahmachari celibate

brahmacharya celibacy in body and mind

brahmand universe

brahmic pertaining to Brahman or Aksharbrahman

butta embroidered floral or figured design

C

chakhdi wooden footwear

chamar leatherworker

chandan sandalwood

chandlo auspicious vermilion mark applied on the forehead

chaturmas four months of the monsoon season

chhatra decorative canopy

chibhda a kind of fruit similar to cucumber

chipiyo a long iron forcep-like thing

chorashi a feast given to all the 84 types of Brahmins

chula fireplace

churma kind of sweet dish made of crumbled rotlo, ghee and jaggery

curry a gravy with different types of vegetable

D

dagli upper garment

daivi godly

dakla a kind of drum played by a person who exorcises evil spirits

dakshina gift given by host

dal spicy soup of dissolved pulses

dandi a sannyasi with a staff

darbar royal court

darshan seeing the murti or the living form of God or his Sadhu with devotion and reverence.

deshi raag folk tunes

deva god

devi minor goddess

devi-vala one who has the devi at his command

Dham abode of God – Akshardham

dharmashala accommodation for pilgrims

dhoti lower garment worn by men

dhun chanting the name of God

dudh piti drowning of female baby in a bowl of milk

dudhpak sweet delicacy of milk, rice and condiments

E

ekantik one who possesses dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti

F

fagwa sanctified food offered as prasad during the festival of Holi

fakir Muslim mendicant or ascetic

G

garashiya feudal chief

garuda eagle

gatariyu upper garment worn by a sadhu or parshad

ghee clarified butter

ghelo unwise

gulal fragrant reddish powder used on joyous occasions

gunatit transcending the gunas. One who transcends the three gunas of maya – sattvagun, rajogun and tamogun, i.e., has no trace or influence of maya whatsoever

guru spiritual teacher; preceptor

H

hindolo swing

holi a festival of colour

hridayakash 'space within the heart'. Spiritual region of the heart. The inner self

I

indriya sense, through which one can 'know' and perform actions

ishtadev favourite deity. Beloved God

J

jai call of victory

jalebi kind of sweet made from gram flour, sugar, ghee

jamo a lower garment

janoi the sacred thread worn by Brahmins and sadhus

jati person with great self-control, a celibate

jav a kind of grain offered in yagna

jiva synonymous with atma; soul

jivanmukta redeemed during this very life

jnan knowledge

jogi one who practices yoga

juvar a type of grain

K

kal time, the universal and continuous phenomenon that accounts for and gives rise to the progression of existence and events – allowing for the past, present and future – and which ultimately leads to the destruction of all things, thus often used as a synonym of death and destruction

kalshi a unit of measurement

kanthi double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by satsangis upon initiation into the Satsang Fellowship and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God

kesar chandan saffron mixed in sandalwood

khatras an observance in which only food devoid of the six types of taste – sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy – is eaten

khichdi spiced boiled rice and lentil grain

khijdo a kind of tree

kodra inferior quality of grain lacking in nutrition. Similar in size and shape to mustard

seeds, but white in colour. Stored in times of famine because of its resilience against extreme weather conditions and time, but generally eaten only by the poor

kothari administrative head of mandir

kumkum vermilion powder used for applying chandlo

kusang evil company

L

lakh one hundred thousand

M

maalpuva a sweet delicacy

mahant head of a mandir, shrine or math

mahapurush a great person

mahor coin

mandal group. In the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the sadhus were often formed into groups to travel and preach in different regions

mansi puja mental worship. Form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers arti, thal, etc., to God mentally

math monastery, ashram of ascetics

maund 20 kilogrammes

mena a wooden chariot in which Bhagwna Swaminarayan used to sit and which then was carried on the shoulder by four person

moksha liberation from maya and cycle of birth and deaths

muhurt special times of the day during which special ceremonies are to be performed. Thus, a marriage ceremony, the opening of a new store or laying the foundation stone of a mandir will not be performed at a randomly chosen date or time, but carefully fixed after first consulting the appropriate astrological texts.

mukta liberated soul

mumukshu spiritual aspirant

mundia an abusive terms used by people to address Paramhansas with shaven heads

murti sacred image of God or a deity that is revered and worshipped

murti-pratishtha consecration of murtis in a mandir

N

nirgun without gunas. Not possessing any attributes of the three gunas - sattvagun,

rajogun and tamogun - i.e., transcends all mayik qualities. Divine

nirlobh non-covetousness

nirman humility

nishkam absolute celibacy

nissneh detachment

nisswad non-taste

P

pada composition

paduka footwear

pagh long, thin piece of cloth tied around the head like a turban to form a traditional headdress

palkhi a carriage in which important people are carried from place to place by bearers

panchtirthi pilgrimage of five places

paramhansa A male sadhu of the highest order, characterized by his ability to discriminate between sat and asat – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water. The highest order of ascetics

parath a kind of buffalo whose milk is naturally sweet

parayan spiritual discourses held for several days

Parmeshwar God

Narayan God

parshad a person who becomes a sadhu in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya passes through two initiations. The first is parshad, wherein he wears white robes but observes the full vows of a sadhu. The second initiation is that of a sadhu, who wears ochre robes

pativrata chaste wife

pattar wooden bowl for eating

penda a sweetmeat made from milk

pitamber yellow silken cloth garment

potlu a piece of cloth used as a bag

pradakshina circumambulation

prapti attainment

prasad sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God

prasadi refer prasad

puja ritual of worship with materials such as kumkum, sandalwood paste, rice, flowers

pujan the act of worshiping

purani a person reading scriptures

puri small, flat and round fried pieces of wheat dough

R

raag tune

rand abusive word used for widow

rangoli traditional design made on festive days with special coloured powder

ras circular traditional dance accompanied by devotional singing

rayan a berry-like, slightly sweet fruit that grows on the rayan tree

rotlo an unleavened bread

rotli thin, soft, circular bread of wheat flour

rozo a kind of horse

rudraksha the seed of the plant eleocarpus lanceolaties

S

sadguru a high ranking sadhu; also a realized sadhu

samdarshi just, fair

samhita compendium

samskar to improve upon something, sacrament

sankhya yogi yogi who has renounced activities. Refers to a renunciant who is totally dedicated and committed to Satsang

sannyasi person who has renounced all worldly duties and is living as an ascetic

sansar mundane life, the cycle of birth and death

sarangi traditional Indian stringed musical instrument played by stroking with a bow and depressing strings on a fretted neck

sarod traditional Indian stringed musical instrument played by plucking with a plectrum and depressing strings on a fret-less neck, similar to a present-day sarod

sat-chit-anand truth-consciousness-bliss

sati a woman who has total goodness and chastity. Also refers to a woman who immolated herself on the cremation pyre of her dead husband

satsang sat = truth or good, sang = company or group. Satsang refers to keeping the company of pious and virtuous people. Satsang is also used to describe the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya

satsangi a member of the Satsang felllowship. One who practices satsang

satyasankalp one who fulfills everyone's wishes

seva service

sevak one who performs seva

shakha branch of sampradaya

shakotsav a festival in which different vegetables are offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan in their raw form

shastra scripture

shastri a person learned in Sanskrit texts and scriptures

shelu rich fabric with a silky finish woven with golden or silver threads and detailed, decorative edges worn as an upper garment or tied around the head or waist, or even left to rest upon the shoulders

shikha a small or long tuft of hair at the centre on the back of the head of renunciants

shikhar pinnacle

shikharbaddh mandir which has shikhars or pinnacles in which five artis are performed daily and daily worship of deities is performed only by sadhus

shira-puri a sweet delicacy made of wheat flour, ghee and sugar, normally in semi-liquid form called shiro and unleavened fried bread made of wheat flour called as puri

shloka verses in Sanskrit

shrifal coconut used in rituals

sindur tilak 'U' shaped mark made with sindur

sinhasan throne for murtis of God or Satpurush

sparsh touch

sud bright half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar

sukhdi a sweet delicacy made from wheat flour, ghee and gur

surval trouser-like lower garment

swabhav a person's vicious natures such as lust, anger, greed, jealousy, egotism, etc. Also used to refer to a person's natures in the form of habits formed after repeated actions, in this birth or in the one's past

swarup form

T

tabla pair of drums. Traditional Indian percussion instrument played to accompany the singing of devotional songs

tal sesame seed

tantra body of religious text containing mantras for the worship of deities or the attainment of superhuman powers

thal food offered to Bhagwan – with or without singing the appropriate bhajans

tilak 'U' shaped mark, usually made with sandalwood paste on one's forehead

tirth sacred place

trishul trident

tumbdi gourd

U

upasana knowledge that God is supreme, the all-doer, always a divine personality and ever present on earth in human form

urdhva pundra upright

V

vad dark half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar

vairagi an ascetic

vairagya detachment from material objects and pursuits

varna social order of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra

varnashram stage and duties of life

dharma duties of each of the social order

vartman vow

vicharan spiritual travels

viman divine chariot

Y

yagna a ceremonial ritual performed as worship to earn the blessings of God

yagna-mandap a place where yagna is performed

yogic relating to yoga